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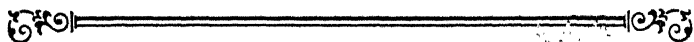






DEAR SENATOR





# DEAR SENATOR

*By*

McCREADY HUSTON

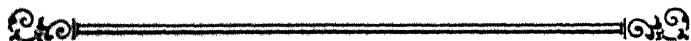


*What country, friends is this?*

*This is Illyria, lady.*

—TWELFTH NIGHT.

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*To*

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF HIS  
WORK, WHICH MADE THE YEARS OF PERSISTENCE  
TOLERABLE,—EVEN REASONABLE.



## AFTERTHOUGHT BY WAY OF PRELUDE

There is, unfortunately, no arresting way of saying that the characters in a book are all fictitious. Mr. Sinclair Lewis has found the plain statement of fact the most serviceable; and, since some readers may think they recognize in this story persons of consequence, such as senators and governors, and reading may absently reach for their telephone to put in a call for a lawyer, I desire to say that no matter how certain they are they will still be wrong, using the simple assertion of Mr. Lewis. I need hardly add that no state named Illyria has yet been admitted. When it is formed it will be composed of lands ceded by states lying somewhere between Pennsylvania and Nebraska and between the Canadian line and the Ohio River.

M. H.





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## CHAPTER I

LAUREL FIFE and her company would arrive at a junction ten miles from Empire about noon, the manager of the theater said; and he wondered if I would drive over there, meet the train and bring the star to her hotel. He would go himself, he explained, but he hesitated to ask Miss Fife to ride in his open car on such a rough March day. The other members of the *Nightfall* cast could use the busses or the inter-urban, but Miss Fife, he thought, should have private transportation.

I thought so, too. I disliked invading the privacy of stage people on tour,—which was one reason for my failure as a reporter,—but I could see that Miss Fife might welcome finishing her tedious rail journey from Detroit in an automobile if it would spare her the interurban; so when her train drew in at the junction I was on the platform to make known the plan of the house manager in Empire.

Miss Fife's hand baggage and a young woman I supposed was her maid were in the rear seat of my quaint old sedan almost immediately, while the dozen or so players of the troupe trailed across to the bus station. I had placed Miss Fife beside me and was

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guiding the machine toward the state highway leading to Empire when she asked, "Are you connected with the theater?" I thought that was a tactful way for her to be polite to somebody to whom she possibly felt indebted.

"No," I explained. "I am just a newspaper man, a friend of the manager. He would have come for you himself, but he did not want to risk your taking cold in an open car after the heat of the train."

(I am glad this story is under way in this simple narrative fashion. After I had finished the final draft of the manuscript I sent it to my old editor, John Fordyce, and asked him to write an introduction to this interpretation of Senator Meredith. He declined on the ground that a story begun at the right place, namely the beginning, needed no introduction. He said you have begun by introducing your principal woman character in action and in conversation, so I advise you to let the first page stand. He added:

("Any introduction will give the impression that you are afraid the reader will not be patient enough to stick to your story until he sees it is something more than a conventional novel of politics and journalism. You must go right ahead with the first scene showing how your acquaintance with Laurel Fife was formed the day she came to Empire to appear in the theater.")

(And so I decided to let it go without the introduction I had hoped Fordyce would write.

(I recall that I countered by saying I thought the

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beginning should have more style and color. No, he wrote back; the thing to-day is the lean hard method; staccato. Just set down what your people said and what they did. But what about beauty? I objected.

("That is just it," wrote Fordyce. "The harder and leaner and the more staccato, the more it will make people speak of the elusive, melancholy beauty.")

That was thoughtful of the house manager, Miss Fife acknowledged. I could have told her that the last three stars who had appeared in Empire had snuffled and coughed all evening. The manager was willing to take some trouble to break the series.

"I've never played Empire," she went on. "I suppose, being a newspaper man, you know everybody there."

"Empire is growing so rapidly that no loyal member of the Chamber of Commerce would pretend that he knew everybody. You see, our Chamber-of-Commerce and Civic-Club-luncheon-speaker population is a hundred and twenty-five thousand, so the actual population must be close to a hundred thousand. However, my business does put me into touch."

She was silent. Though I wanted to hear her talk, in that voice that had become one of the important things in the theater, it was my duty to deliver her safely to the hotel, and, as the road was slippery, I decided she was prudent to be quiet and not divert my attention. I had just reconciled myself to necessity when she startled me with a question.

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"Do you know a man in Empire named Scott Meredith?"

"You must mean Dan Meredith. He is known as Dan, though I believe his full name is Daniel Scott. Yes; I was talking to him this morning."

"Do you object to driving quite slowly? Or is there a longer way around? We seem to be coming into Empire, judging from the bill-boards."

"I can turn off here and go in on the Lincoln Highway,—three or four miles longer."

"Thank you. So you know Mr. Meredith. . . ."

I didn't press the point. I was curious, of course. But the truth was, I felt sorry for this unusual and unusually beautiful woman, groping for information about a man. It seemed to me that she had earned the right to be indifferent; but I could tell from her tone that she was the victim of a powerful compulsion to find out what she could about Meredith while she had a favorable opportunity. I knew she would pursue the subject; and I had a premonition that what was to come would be painful.

"I have known many newspaper men in my time in the theater," she said. "I have learned they keep confidences on request."

That needed no confirmation. She went on:

"Why does Mr. Meredith go by the name of Dan? Why not Daniel, or Scott? Dan,—that sounds so . . . familiar."

I smiled at the asphalt.

"That's why he uses it. He wants the great Ameri-

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can people, as represented in our county, to be sure he is one of them. All our Daniels are Dans; all our Samuels are Sams; all our Edwards are Eds. You are now entering 'The Valley of Democracy'; that's the way our names are; and Dan Meredith is one of us."

"You mean he has adopted Dan as a kind of . . . trade-mark?"

"I don't know; I am only explaining a condition. If you knew him as Scott Meredith and he is now Dan, it may be because he feels a Scott would not get as far in Empire as a Dan. Everybody takes for granted anybody named Dan is honest; that in itself is a good beginning for a lawyer with political interests."

She thought that over for a while and then asked timidly, so timidly that I pitied her, the question I was by this time expecting:

"Is he, is Dan Meredith, married?"

I thought the best thing to do was to nod. I knew she was watching me.

We were among the bill-boards on the other route now. In five minutes we would be in the heavy traffic of which Empire is so proud. Miss Fife asked if she had heard me correctly, that Meredith was a lawyer, to which I nodded and added, "Very much so."

I was not praising his legal ability. What I had in mind was the way he prosecuted the law as a business. He was one of the members of the bar who usually referred to their profession as "the law business," an expression I had never heard before going to live in Empire.

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After three or four blocks she observed:

"I needn't ask you not to mention my inquiries . . . to him."

"Of course not. And if there is any way. . . ."

"No! That is impossible; unthinkable."

She meant, I assumed, that she wanted to see Meredith and was forcing herself to dismiss the idea. We were against the orange line in front of the hotel now and I hurried around the car to open the door and escort her to the lobby.

Hood, the local manager, was in the entrance with Miss Fife's key. An old showman, he never overlooked a chance to be gallant to the great people of the stage he succeeded in booking for our one-night stands.

The lobby of the Midland Hotel is surrounded by a mezzanine. While Laurel Fife was listening to Hood's greeting, her eyes were sweeping this.

"I want to thank this young man," she interposed, turning from Hood and drawing me aside. She said swiftly:

"When could you be standing here talking with Scott Meredith . . . could you arrange it? Would it be too much? If you were standing here and I were on the mezzanine. . . ."

I could not count on Meredith. He might be out of town. But I wanted to make Miss Fife feel my devotion, so I said boldly:

"I shall have him here at five o'clock; on this spot."

She said, "Bless you," and turned back to be gracious to Hood for a moment before going up-stairs.



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It was only a question of getting into touch with Meredith. My position gave me an advantage over any Empire citizen in active politics for I was on the Republican newspaper. Office-holders, those who hoped to be office-holders and those whose business it was to make office-holders felt they had to be nice to me. They should not have felt that way; I could not have done them any harm if I had been so inclined. But the legend of newspaper power was sufficient to command respect; so all I had to do was telephone to Meredith and let him know I wanted to see him, asking him to meet me in the lobby of the Midland a few minutes before five.

Meredith did not like us; that is, the paper. He pretended to whenever such pretense was necessary, but I was certain he was restless under having to be courteous to us; and I respected him for that. I have always been irregular as a journalist in preferring men who resist newspaper bullying. In Dan's case, I felt his undercurrent of hostility to editorial surveillance was an indication of a valuable hidden substance in his character that might be worth developing.

I let him know I wanted to discuss something political, giving him a hint that it had something to do with the affairs of Senator Harding, of Ohio. Three or four men in the county, of whom Meredith was one, were becoming known as Harding men. They intended to bring Harding to Empire for a meeting before the state primary. They were saying that Harding would be the

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Republican nominee for the presidency. This was three months before the Chicago convention of 1920.

I knew little of Meredith at the time. I inferred he was about thirty. His law practise consisted chiefly of settling claims against the interurban electric and bus lines and defending the company when the cases he could not settle got into court. He was said to have made what the newspapers call a "splendid record" for selling Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps in 1918 and 1919. This did not impress me. Dragooning timid corporation employees into buying bonds beyond their ability to pay was not an uncommon occupation during and just after the war. He had not enlisted in 1917. When the Armistice came in 1918 he was reported to have been a disappointed applicant for admission to an officers' training camp. This report was circulated about many men. If a man had the right kind of personality his friends and acquaintances would build up for him a generally accepted tradition of having tried every means of getting to the fire step, all without success.

My private inference was that Meredith was one of those who simply had not wanted to go into the army, but, as it was impolitic to say so, he had permitted the story of repeated fruitless efforts to go around while he was making speeches in all of the loan campaigns, getting before scores of audiences to which he had no difficulty explaining his sad position among the unwanted.

This did not anger me. I knew so many men upon whom the need for troops did not register. They simply

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were not fighters; and it was a pity they were deprived of a chance to say so and thus avoid the complicated deceit practised by them and their families and friends. But the argument of selective service, with each man supposed to be placed where he would be most useful, had made it easy for a million, of whom Meredith was one, to prevent the war from affecting them seriously. It was the phrase, "selective service," that suggested to many men the possibility of evading the army quite legally.

He was the kind that does well on the platform. Just over six feet tall, dark and handsome in the rugged style that seems to suggest the homely virtues, he could make platitudes sound like forceful logic. People first said that Dan Meredith looked honest. After saying that for a while they found it easy to say he was honest. Until this day my only thought about him had been that he fitted the younger political type of 1920 perfectly. This was the man Laurel Fife desired to observe from concealment on the hotel mezzanine,—honest Dan Meredith, Empire's leading Harding man.

He was waiting for me, seated on the upholstered bench that ran along the walls of the public room of the Midland. It was a good setting for him. Built in the last phase of the grand period of hotel construction, the Midland had a lobby that might have served as the rotunda of a state capitol. The room was three stories high, with a colored glass dome above that. On the side opposite the entrance the grand staircase, said by Empire enthusiasts to be the finest in the state of

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Illyria, took its creamy marbled way to the broad dim mezzanine. On this were a profusion of divans, tables and strange fretful-looking chairs on which people waited for appointments. The walls of the mezzanine were lined with oil landscapes of the kind usually seen in hotels thirty years ago.

Altogether you must imagine an impression of brass, pinkish marble, plush, mahogany and gilt, with, of course, the desk, newsstand, telephone booths, tea-room and cafeteria entrances, without being able to tell just where they are; that is the Midland lobby. It made a good background for Dan, for he was more florid than not.

We executed our plan perfectly, Laurel Fife and I. Glancing upward across Meredith's shoulder as I stood before him in the center of the room, I saw the white oval of Laurel's face above the heavy brass railing of the mezzanine. The next time I looked it was gone. So I said:

"So we can count on you to let us know if you decide to bring Harding here?"

And he answered something like:

"Certainly; I'll call you."

I was turning away, numb with suppressed excitement over the success of my effort to serve Miss Fife. I cared nothing about Meredith's plans for a Harding meeting. I was thinking about the woman on the balcony. I could not resist throwing out one inquiry that might help me to a little more light on the mystery of the relationship.

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"Are you going to see Laurel Fife to-night?"

"Laurel Fife? Oh, you mean the actress. No. I don't care much for plays. I like a good musical comedy once in a while. Saw the Duncan Sisters in Chicago last week. And I like a good movie. But I don't go to many plays. My wife'll be going, probably. She goes to everything."

So Meredith did not know Laurel Fife. That name meant nothing to him. It meant nothing to him privately or in its public sense. He evidently did not know that Miss Fife was important. Yet from the moment of her arrival she had been waiting to appease some kind of unexplained desire with a minute or two of beholding him from a distance. Laurel Fife, easily our most widely known and best-loved stage woman, was frantic to see Dan Meredith; and he scarcely knew she existed. He was repeating the ritual of his attitude toward the theater.

" . . . like a show with dancing and a lot of comedy. Frank Tinney and Al Jolson . . ."

I left him. I was depressed; almost dejected. I wanted to get away from him. I was convinced that he was too talented, too well endowed, to fall into the habit so many business men had formed of carefully stating and restating a liking for musical shows and a lack of interest in plays. As I went out I was wondering if he knew better and had adopted the standard comment on the theater as he had adopted a style in names, in order to appear to the most people as one of them. I wondered if he could be a composite of studied and

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adopted conventionalities. If he were operating by a plan to which this was the clue he was smarter than I had supposed. He must be, I concluded, if he meant something to a woman of Laurel Fife's attainments.

Her play proved to be one of those that foster the business man's habitual defense against attendance. It was not her fault, I suspected. Actresses must have plays and, lacking good ones, must use what they can get. You will recall she had spent three years in *Undertow*. Then, without a part strong enough to follow that, she had done Juliet for a season. The autumn of the first post-war year she was presented in this piece called *Nightfall*, spending five months on Broadway and then going on tour.

As *Nightfall* unfolded I wondered how the play had lasted through the winter. Beginning as a psychological study, with the main interest a collision of temperaments, it turned without warning in the second act into a crook play. In that act the stolen necklace was returned, so from then on the author had no play; and the actors seemed to spend the third act sitting around talking about it, apparently trying to decide how to bring it to an end. They seemed to know they had to keep the seat buyers there until ten forty-five.

It was during this period of strain that Mr. Hood tiptoed down the aisle and told me that Miss Fife would like me to come behind after the show. I assumed she felt she owed me thanks for the trifling service of maneuvering Dan Meredith into her range. This did

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not impel me toward the stage entrance; what did draw me was the hope that she would discuss the play a little. It was so bad I wanted to hear her admit it. I disliked to think that anybody I admired as much as I did Laurel Fife would imagine that *Nightfall* was a play.

I was sitting on one of those backless kitchen chairs always found backstage in the theater, waiting for Miss Fife to be ready for the street, when I was bewildered to have stop before me the girl known on the playbill as Dixon Latrobe. She was in her coat and hat. Putting her little dressing-case on the floor, she told me Miss Fife had asked her to come and talk to me until she was dressed, and to inquire if I would go down the street for supper at their hotel.

This girl had been on my mind all evening, so much so that at first I could acknowledge my willingness and delight only by gutturals that could not have been called words. Laurel Fife had rewarded me by sending to me one who in the play had already revolutionized my carefully constructed standards of beauty and who now, in her own person, was causing me to make over all of my life plans. I gave her the backless chair, glad to be able to coordinate to that extent. I have never had that light touch, that elusive air of careless ease, that makes my contemporaries so pleasing to charming women.

"You are on the newspaper here, Miss Fife tells me."

I waited. I think that if Dixon Latrobe had said then that newspaper work must be interesting and had added that she had always wanted to be a writer, I

would have rushed from the theater directly to the river. But she not only did not say those things: she gave me the impression that she was incapable of them. She went on:

"This piece is terrible, isn't it? We don't know what to do about it. The people out front don't seem to object to it; and Miss Fife must have a play. This one can not make up its mind what it is about. It makes me think of what happens when one is watching dancing and the man with the lights can not keep the dancers in the spot . . . confusing and irritating."

This was just what I had felt about *Nightfall* without being able to phrase it that way.

"Somebody must write Miss Fife a play. Why don't you?"

I did not like that. I was familiar with a certain feminine method of ascribing any power to whatever male was at hand,—a trite piece of technique. It did not belong to Dixon Latrobe. She had no reason to flatter me. For her to do so suggested that she was attaching no seriousness to our meeting. But why should she? I reminded myself. I suppose I had been elevated in spirit by my association with Miss Fife during the day. To be brought to earth by a minor member of the company with a remark a prom girl would make to a college boy was a reduction to my place for which I was not prepared.

I have always been glad that Laurel appeared then for if she had not I probably would have said something peevish and asinine. But in a moment the three of us



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were going down the alley and across town to the Midland, where we found seats in one of those places called a coffee shoppe.

Around us were many of the audience of a few minutes before. While I was not, I hope, unduly elated by my position as escort of the star in the presence of my townsmen, I was not exactly depressed. I felt more than one pair of eyes on us, but I found I could endure this penalty of my temporary association.

Miss Fife told me that she and Miss Latrobe would have scrambled eggs, toast and coffee, and, as soon as I had instructed the waitress, she leaned toward me and added:

"He wasn't out front."

"No. He told me he wasn't going."

I didn't think it necessary to repeat Meredith's declaration of policy toward the stage.

"Were . . . any of his family there?"

She could not bring herself to say "his wife."

"Yes. Mrs. Meredith and her father and sister. They are sitting at a table half-way down the room. You see a white-haired man and beside him a woman in a blue cloak with a white fur collar. That is Mrs. Meredith."

As Miss Fife looked across my shoulder I could not watch her face. Her hands were knotted on the table, so I studied them. As I glanced up I met Dixon's eyes. She had been looking at me. As our gazes met I forgave her the hurt in her remark about writing a play. She seemed to be saying, "I know all about Laurel's interest in this fellow; you and I must help her all we can."

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Of course Dixon knew. Everything about her position as Miss Fife's companion confirmed that. The waitress clattered dishes in our ears and Miss Fife sighed.

"So that is Scott Meredith's wife. . . ."

I was sorry that Mrs. Meredith was what she was. I was sure that since Laurel had to find this man married she would desire to be convinced at first glance that in marrying he had complimented her, for by this time I was certain Dan and Laurel had known each other at some previous time.

What Mrs. Dan Meredith was—a woman wholly undistinguished—Miss Fife evidently divined at once, for she did not look again, but began to bring the talk of the moment within our trio.

"Well, I've gone through Julia Dawson's lines again. I always wonder how I do it and how I can fill my next engagement. It seems to me to be asking so much of people to sit through the piece. We ought to give them their money back after every performance. But they refuse to see how poor it is. The critics have told them, but they pay no attention. I should not complain, though; I don't want to grow into a kind of tradition,—one of the great sorrows of the American theater because she can not find a suitable play."

I would have enjoyed hearing her talk shop, but I saw her glance waver, then flee down the room to where Dan Meredith's wife was sitting. Her eyes mused on Alice Meredith, and Dixon and I were forgotten. When she came back to us, Laurel began getting her things

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together, and I knew that so far as she was concerned my day was over.

"I must go up. Old women must have their sleep. To be frank, I came in here thinking that some of his people might be visible. They are, so I'm through for the day. Perhaps you and Dixon would like to talk a while. Don't keep her too long; we make an early train."

She moved toward the lobby, her sleeve brushing Alice Meredith's as she passed. At the elevator she gave me her hand.

"Thanks for everything. You'd make a good manager."

As the door closed, Dixon said, "Let's sit somewhere and smoke a cigarette."

So it was that, on the mezzanine of the Midland Hotel from which Laurel Fife had watched Dan Meredith, I heard from Dixon Latrobe the story of the two.

"She would not object to my giving you the outline. In fact, I think she left me with you for that purpose. Laurel is very kind and very fair. She probably wants you to know a little more than you do. I am her only intimate; nobody else knows how this man has affected her life. The story begins back about 1912 when she and this Meredith were both young enough to make the facts probable.

"You must imagine yourself in Atlantic City," Dixon went on, "seeing what you suppose is Life, for the first

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time. You are very young and very innocent and very romantic, but you do not know it.

"You leave Jackson's, where you have been listening to the Three White Kuhns, assuring yourselves, you and your companion, that they are the funniest entertainers living; and you walk down the Boardwalk to finish the evening in Old Vienna. It is necessary to do this; part of the ritual. You begin the day with the eleven o'clock swim and end it in Old Vienna with a stein of cold dark beer. The orchestra leader there is very amusing; you have to go to Old Vienna to see him and hear his band. He knows and recognizes some of the patrons. To be nodded to, smiled at, by the conductor is to be wholly sophisticated.

"I am trying to tell you what Scott Meredith did in Atlantic City in 1912 as I have picked it up from Laurel. Unless you understand what he did there, and particularly what he felt about it, you will not be able to account for what Laurel has done to-day. She and Scott were in Atlantic City together eight years ago, when she was twenty. He must have been twenty-three or four."

## CHAPTER II

THIS is to be a report of the story Dixon Latrobe told me that night after the play. You are to imagine her sitting there in a corner of a hotel davenport talking about Dan Meredith and Laurel Fife and passing occasionally into comment directed at me. I am not trying to recreate her phrases; what you get is a synthesis of the story. The language is mine; the thoughts are hers. I have submitted this interpretation to her and she says it is accurate in the main. The quoted passages are her asides to me and my own remarks.

Meredith and Laurel had been to Jackson's and had gone from there to Old Vienna. Earlier they had been in one or two other cafés and had been dancing on a pier. He had met her irregularly. "To-day"—I interjected—"people would nod and say, 'Of course; naturally.'" "But," Dixon went on, "I want to make clear that their being together had nothing common about it. You may not be able to imagine your man Meredith rescuing an unknown girl from a queer hotel in New York and then giving her a quite proper vacation by the seaside. But he did that. Meredith as a knight? Well, I don't blame you for smiling; but I am telling you the facts."

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Dixon, it appeared, had been called to the mezzanine rail that afternoon to look at Meredith as he and I had stood on the lobby floor.

He had, the story goes, gone to New York the summer of his admission to the bar vaguely hoping he would not have to practise. There was nothing for him to do about starting. A place was being fixed up for him by friends of his father. But he felt an aversion to beginning. Like so many boys he had studied for a profession favored by his father and, with no original liking for it, had drifted that summer into a lassitude punctuated by intervals of restlessness. His father, Laurel gathered, was what a little later came to be called a realtor, a man with such an admiration for the professions that he had decreed his son should be a lawyer, regardless of fitness or desire. He seems to have been one of the first real-estate agents to conceive making his own business a profession.

But with an office rented, Scott craved a respite. He said he was going on a vacation. So he took the three hundred dollars his father skeptically handed him and got on the next train for New York.

As I reconstruct that trip—and I have been with Miss Fife long enough to have heard and thought a lot about it—I see Meredith emerging from the Pennsylvania Terminal into the heat of Seventh Avenue in August, his momentary hesitation noted by the wise eye of a negro hotel runner who shambled to his side and inquired if he had a reservation. Meredith, of

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course, didn't know that his suitcase, his hesitancy, his uncertain glance toward the forest of towers eastward, had already answered the runner's question. He dismissed the man and crossed to Thirty-Third Street, imagining registering and being taken to a room in a hotel he had chosen by its bill-board advertising. It was his introduction to New York, aged experience in the form of the negro following him down the block to the crossing of Broadway and Sixth Avenue. Returning from tour I have always thought of this as the longest block in the world.

He was weary, warm and dejected when he turned in at the entrance of the hotel; and he was still more depressed when he saw the queues of men at the desk, waiting their turns for rooms. No boy had come to get his suitcase. All the boys were standing among piles of hand baggage from which they would move quickly, by some technique of their own, to the front of the press of guests and, with registration slip in hand, lead some fortunate or forehanded person toward the elevators. The boys knew that only a part of this crowd would find rooms. That was why Meredith was left standing against his pillar. The negro outside knew it. He was certain Meredith would reappear presently to be led three squares away, where a room of a sort in a hotel of a sort, awaited him. The negro would get a tip from Meredith and a silver commission from the house, then go back to the terminal to repeat the operation.

"Do you want to hear the rest of it?" Dixon asked.

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"It's half past twelve and they've begun to save light current in the lobby. I can write you the details of what happened that night."

"Please go on," I pleaded. "I'll get off to-morrow and drive you to Grand Rapids if you miss your train."

You see, she resumed, Meredith left alone would not have gone to a place like that hotel. But he had been riding on a train for thirty-six hours and had left some of his buoyancy along the road. He was tired and baffled. So he let the negro lead him.

There was something unstated about the hotel. Even a boy as inexperienced as Meredith could infer that as a building and as an institution it was decayed. A long, narrow, dark lobby ran back from the entrance and ended at a small, circular desk covered with frayed oil-cloth. Behind this was a young man with a face like chalk. Laurel has often commented on the impression this city face made on Scott. The only other attendant visible was a colored elevator boy, lounging in the door of his car. Guests might have been sitting in the shadows of the neglected room, for the place gave the feeling of people being there but keeping very quiet about what they were doing.

Meredith wrote his name on the register and the elevator boy shuffled forward and took his bag. They went up, perilously it must have seemed to Scott, seven stories, to a dirty room masked by tall coarse lace curtains, gray with dust. This place was too dismal even for a guest as weary as Meredith, so he left it



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without opening his bag and presently was trudging along Broadway toward brighter scenes to be found above Forty-Second Street.

Just before midnight he was returning unwillingly to the warren, intending to doze with his clothes on till daylight and be among the first to register in some sanitary place next day. Ahead of him in the dark canyon of Thirty-First Street walked a man and a girl he had noticed a few minutes before in Herald Square. The girl would walk half a dozen steps, then stop, seeming to protest; but her companion, his arm within hers, would urge her on. They turned in at Meredith's hotel just as he came up; and in the bad light of the entrance she paused and looked at him. This was the first meeting of Scott Meredith and Laurel Fife.

He must have seen in that look everything she hoped he would; for, as the episode has been made clear to me, he measured her companion with what must have been a threatening glance. He had taken two or three drinks and was feeling competent. The girl's companion didn't care for the glance. He half turned and confronted Scott with an angry, "Well?"

The trio went into the elevator together, the girl—Laurel as she was then—huddling in a corner of the car, weeping audibly, her head bowed. She has told me that she kept repeating, "Can't you get me out of this? Oh, please, get me out of this!"

The man laughed once and exclaimed, "What? this kid?"

Scott was in a daze. The situation had appeared be-

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fore him so suddenly; but, as the car inched upward, he saw—as he told Laurel afterward—that he must do something. He said there was something about the droop of her shoulders—so pitiable. She must have been a dejected, shabby little thing that night. It wasn't really like that, he found out later; but that is what he acted on and what I have always thought was a key to his character—as it was then. Well, instead of calling his own floor he rode on past it with them. I liked that in him; he couldn't step out and leave her.

The man said, "Ten," and stepped in front of the exit. Just then everything seemed quite simple to Scott, for he said, "You'll let her go, of course?" He had the whole foolhardy plan in his mind, he admitted later.

"That's none of your damned business," the other answered comfortably, as the elevator boy stopped the car and opened the door.

Scott then did the most generous, most uncompromising thing of his life,—he hit the girl's companion under the ear and knocked him into the corridor. Then he ordered the boy to drop the elevator.

"Let me off at seven," he said. To the girl he whispered, "Wait for me around in the McAlpin lobby."

He seems to have had in mind that by stopping by his room for his bag he would also lead the pursuit in his own direction and give the girl a better chance to get away. He gave the elevator boy whatever he had in his change pocket, rushed into the hall at the seventh floor, seized his unopened bag in his room, and then ran down the stairs. He slapped a five-dollar bill on the

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counter in the lobby and told the blinking night clerk he was checking out. In five minutes he found Laurel in the McAlpin, seated on a marble bench near the Thirty-Fourth Street side.

I'm not certain just how Laurel wants me to put the next part. You've gathered she has come to the place she wants a contact in Empire, or wherever Meredith may be. She said, "Dixon, do you think that young man from the newspaper will do?" Laurel is that way. She pointed to you from the railing there and asked me. I think it's necessary for her to have a release,—don't you understand by this time that she has been in love with Meredith for eight years; with a man who doesn't even know her name?

Dixon was leaning toward me as I sat facing her. Her hands were clasped. I suddenly saw that immersion in somebody else's cause was one of the most becoming states for a girl. She must have seen that I was thinking about her eyes and not about Laurel, for the moment, for she dropped them, and went on rather hurriedly.

"The next is hard to make clear. You've got to infer the right things. You and I are trying to do something for her as a person that will help her as an artist. You've got to let me give you their talk as I imagine it was."

"I shall take it in whatever way you say. I have nothing important to do here, and if in helping Laurel I can . . . please you . . ."

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You see, I couldn't resist what seemed to me to be the necessity of letting Dixon know she had a personal stake in my entering the case. She was going away; I might not see her again.

Dixon passed the sally as it deserved, being one that might have been made by a sophomore to a prom girl.

As they sat in the Pennsylvania Station—they went over there thinking it would be safer—Laurel told Scott she wasn't trying to make him believe she didn't start for that hotel with Cleave Torrey or didn't know where she was going. There was nothing of abducted innocence and beauty in the case.

To put it plainly, just as it was, she had made herself suppose she could go with him for the sake of a part he could give her in a play that he was casting for a road company. You'll have to know Laurel to understand that. She had to get started. She had to have a job and it had to be at the kind of work she was determined to do. She had reasoned it out, when she had starved long enough, that she could pay any price for a foothold; and Torrey happened to be the sort who made that kind of bargain. "I'll have to get on the stage or I shall die," is the way she put it to Meredith afterward.

"You don't need to explain it to me," Meredith answered. "You sounded to me in the elevator as if you had to have help; and I'm satisfied Torrey fell clear out of the car. If he hadn't . . ."

"But I want you to know one thing," Laurel per-

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sisted. "Seeing you in the street, passing you in the entrance, I suddenly saw how cheap and easy it was for me to be doing what I was. I suppose I would have gone on with Torrey, but you reminded me that I wasn't being square. You looked so . . . fair and generous."

That must have made him uncomfortable. He probably didn't enjoy being told he looked virtuous and unselfish. He did not intend to.

Laurel must have looked clearer cut, more finished, than the small-town girls he knew. She says he tried to put that into words, telling her with charming clumsiness that her expression would have made it impossible for him to think anything of her that she did not wish him to. No doubt by this time he was beginning to be affected by her beauty and her simplicity.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he offered. "I'll make you a little loan. I've got about two hundred and sixty dollars. I'll lend you half of it and you can pay it back when you have landed."

She thought about that a while and then asked:

"What were you going to do in New York?"

"I don't know. I was just taking a vacation. I couldn't get into a regular hotel. That's why I was in that other place for the night."

"I'm awfully tired," she went on. "If you were looking for a vacation, why couldn't we go down to the shore and swim and lie in the sand for two or three days?"

While he was silent she added meekly:

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"If I could associate for a little while with a man who wouldn't make me fight but would let me dance and play around as I used to before I started to try to make my own way, I think it would rest me and perhaps reassure me and get me back into the mood for going on. For I am going on. I'm going to act . . . in the end."

"Suppose we go to Atlantic City," Meredith suggested. "I might as well be there as here."

She looked into her purse and found a pasteboard ticket.

"I had to leave my room this morning because my money was gone. My things are all in a suitcase checked at the Grand Central. If you could get it . . ."

Meredith was now determined to see this adventure through, and he said so. She smiled up at him from the station bench.

"It isn't an adventure, you know."

Catching the import of her correction he was quick to reassure her. "I know that. I wouldn't be game for it anyhow. I'm an awful coward in some ways."

"Even if you do hit strange men for strange ladies."

"I'll be back with your things right away," he said, but before he could leave she stopped him.

"While you are gone I think I should like to get some coffee. I haven't eaten since yesterday."

"I should have thought of that." He took her purse and put a bill into it. "After you've had something wait for me here."

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In Atlantic City Meredith remembered the name of a family hotel in Kentucky Avenue where a spinster aunt of his had often stopped. He had never been in the resort, but he assumed such a hotel would be suited to his purpose of giving this strange weary girl a haven. So he took her there, saw her put up according to the facilities of the house, and then went across the street to the duplicate of her hotel, going at once to bed and to sleep. He had told Laurel to meet him on the Boardwalk for dinner that evening when both should be rested.

I am positive, Dixon commented, that it was the natural true Scott Meredith who rescued Laurel and who went with her to Atlantic City and amused himself contentedly with her. At that age he must have had a sense of beauty and a tendency toward truth and proportion in living, for he took her at her word, never pressed an inquiry beyond what information she offered about herself, paid her bills, and—while he understood the whole affair was outside the conventions—did no unworthy speculating about her. Laurel asked him to let her keep her name a secret for a while and he consented in high good humor, helping her make up a good fictitious one for the hotel register.

Laurel confesses that she developed right away a disturbing interest in her benefactor. She soon learned all there was to know about him. And sitting at the end of a pier the second evening, watching the swell of the dark sea, she learned about his uncertainty in starting out as a lawyer. This might have been assumed; he

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might have been playing up to what he imagined was her preference in a man; but Laurel says no. She is positive he was sincere. Evidently they talked about it like this:

"I'm supposed to start in this summer and be a rising young lawyer. They call it 'the law business.' I went through school with the idea that it didn't matter. I thought a fellow could work at anything when he got out; but now the time has come I don't want to begin. But I hate to disappoint my father. He picked the law for me. He thinks a lot of the law and politics."

"What would you like to do?"

"Sounds funny these days, but it's farming. I'd like to own land and raise grain."

"That shouldn't be impossible."

"But it is. Father's father and the men before him were farmers. Father moved to town and got to be a real estate agent. He's like so many men out there,—storekeepers, coal merchants, insurance agents; they worship business and the professions and want all their sons to be lawyers, bankers or doctors. They think they've made progress by leaving the farms and they'd hate to see their children go back. You hear a political speech and it's full of fine words about the farmer, but you couldn't get one of our politicians to go and live on a farm."

Laurel says he tried to tell her then that her example had made him think.

"Take yourself," he said. "You're determined to be an actress at almost any cost. I might go against them all and be what I like if . . ."



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"If you were willing to pay the price; is that it?"

He nodded. "This has made me think about trying to pay it." But thinking is as far as he ever got, poor chap.

They were on terms like that,—indefinite, capable of enjoying the hour. She was going back to New York in a few days and begin her rounds again. Every hour until their separation would steady her, enriching her experience, strengthening her for the struggle she had ahead.

The episode had done something permanent to Laurel's life; she knew she would never be capable again of the decision she had made when Meredith found her with Torrey. That part was over; and so far as her work was concerned, she felt a new confidence. She says she knew now she was going to succeed. For that reason she could afford to take leisurely pleasure in the moment. You can, you know, when your work is safe. Scott's easy, good-natured attitude, what she took for largeness of nature, his boyish delight in the warm kaleidoscope of the nightly carnival of the Boardwalk, and the absence of ugliness from their relations, had restored her. She felt like a person again.

You must keep in mind Meredith had not made love to her. She says he was either trying to live up to his obligation to be chivalrous or he was a little afraid of her on account of what he seemed to think of as her superior experience. Not that he wasn't capable of sweeping her away. Something about his dark remoteness drew her to him almost irresistibly. You'd call it magnetism, wouldn't you? Attraction you can't explain.

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Remember, she was Laurel Fife,—you know she is almost a ~~n~~ emotion. That is what has put her where she is; that and work.

No; he had not made love to her even though she was ready for it. She has told me about that. What was holding him back might have been the beginning of misgivings. After all, he had to make a decision. He had to go back to Illyria or throw everything over and strike out for himself.

She suspected this was troubling him toward the end of their week, for she found he was taking some drinks when he had no real occasion. They often had some together, light things with a dinner, but two or three times she caught the scent of whisky, and he told her of learning about a new drink from a salesman in one of the saloons. He began to waver just a little about that time, she thinks, for she found him looking at her during some of their moments together with the suggestion of an old, old expression which she had long before learned to recognize.

And at that discovery she didn't know what to do, for she didn't want their relations to be clouded. She knew she was learning to love him in her own way, but hints, implications, in his manner made her wary. She says she always thought they needed to be swept together by their emotions for the sake of a solution of the problem that seemed to be rising between them. She thinks that if, on an occasion she remembers, he had kissed her, their two roads from that point on would have been different. If he had suddenly asked her to let him go

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with her, try to get something to do in New York, and make their love the justification for a clean break with everything behind, she would have been proud and happy. That seemed the only possible triumphant conclusion. But he never came to that.

Try to picture the thing changing in values, with Meredith coming to want her, coming to show it in voice and manner, and at the same time holding back from an unreserved confession as if shackled by the claims of his other life. That was the situation when they went into Old Vienna that night, six or seven days after they had come to Atlantic City.

"What happened in the café won't take long to tell," Dixon commented. "Then I must get along to bed."

Laurel says that from the time they sat down and Scott, indicating three old men at a table near them, said, "They're from my home town," something threatening and cruel seemed to start closing them in.

He said he would have to go and speak to them. Laurel, watching him pass among the filled tables, tall, with just a trace of diffidence in his manner, wanted to run after him, pull him back, keep him from joining the trio. She didn't know why then; she just remembers that impulse.

When he leaned across and shook hands with the eldest of the group she discovered one of the others was staring at her. As she accidentally met his eyes, his mouth, which seemed to lack lips, cracked into a smirk

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and he winked at her, jerking his grizzled, partly bald head and pointing at a vacant chair at their table. Keeping his bright old eyes on her, he lifted his glass and attempted to drink. His dark-corded hand shook violently and the liquid splashed over the edge of the glass.

Shuddering, she noted hopefully that Scott was backing away. Evidently he was not going to force her to join his friends. As he was about to turn and come to her, the old man who had leered at her drew him close again for a long whisper. While Meredith was making the passage back to where she sat she had an impression of the three old men from Empire all drinking hastily and greedily, cackling and fidgeting as they talked.

Meredith sat down and began to tell her about these visitors, talking rapidly as if taking refuge from agitation. Afterward, Laurel could not recall the names he recited but she remembered one of the men was a judge, another a lawyer, and a third a newspaper owner. He told her they were friends of his father and had known him from boyhood. They were, he said, almost the three leading men of Empire, if not of that part of his home state of Illyria.

He looked at what was left of her beer and asked if she would rather go and sit on the beach. She was glad to go, but she could not help noting that he was hurrying her. He was not interested so much in getting her away as he was in getting away himself. It was the first really ungenerous thing he had done.

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You see what had happened. Three dirty old men in Atlantic City on a spree had managed to upset Scott Meredith. Perhaps what they said to him confirmed some doubts he had already. Laurel had no way of learning; but she could guess that at home they represented influence and power. Meredith must have been reared on respect for their kind. He may have been afraid of them. He probably looked at the girl beside him on the sand and began to wonder if he had not been reckless. He did not know her name; Laurel had agreed to reveal it in the end, but they had not come to that. Suppose one of the old men had asked him who she was, with the effrontery of an ancient? He could not have answered.

She remembers that they didn't stay long on the beach. Presently he asked her if she was tired, just as he had asked her if she wanted to leave Old Vienna, so she said she was and they walked to her hotel, parting with a definite engagement for breakfast.

Because they were to meet again she was surprised and alarmed to find an envelope in her box when she went downstairs in the morning. When she saw it she felt cold all over for she suspected what it was,—a note from Scott telling her he had checked out at his hotel and had gone home. He thought it better for her; he had come to see what an effect a sojourn such as this might have on her future. He said her bill was paid and he was enclosing a ten-dollar loan for her fare back to New York.

It was the dishonesty, Laurel says, that affected her

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the most as she carried his letter out to the little narrow veranda that did not look out to sea. Saying he was going on her account,—that was not only cruel; it was unworthy of Scott. His only reason for making off was that he had been made afraid for himself. She was positive that he had been made afraid by the judge, the lawyer and the newspaper owner.

"That is all there is to it," Dixon said, standing and strolling toward the mezzanine rail from which Laurel had observed Meredith. "Do you mind if I stretch?"

She had brightened measurably, now that her recital was over; and she said lightly, "Now tell me something about him to carry back to Laurel. She wanted me to give you her side of it and then get your impression of Meredith as he is. Is he going to be somebody?"

"Well, he might," I answered slowly, trying to be fair and exact. "He might be governor, if you call that anything. I mean, you probably would not care for a man who was likely to be governor."

"I see what you mean. But I think Laurel would be happier if Meredith reached the top. She would consider her course justified, in not communicating with him or reasserting her influence."

"I think you can tell her that Meredith will go up, politically. He is the type. His decision, leaving Laurel Fife as he did in Atlantic City, using that method, explains something to me. There are many demands in politics for a man to do things that way. Yes; you are safe in telling her he's going to be a big man in Illyria. But . . . Miss Latrobe, I'm not in politics. What

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about you. Tell me something about yourself before you go."

"Not now. I saw when I suggested that you try writing a play for Laurel that you thought I was making fun of you. You've got to overcome that sensitiveness. I wasn't making fun. I was in earnest. I say what I mean."

She put a hand in mine and added:

"Laurel is going to be grateful to you for to-day. And remember, I could not make fun of you."

We stood there looking at each other, grave and silent. Then she whispered good-by and hurried to the elevator.

It was half past one. As I passed through the half darkened lobby on my way to the street I suddenly remembered that for two hours I had been expected in the office to write a review of Laurel Fife's play for the morning paper.

### CHAPTER III

AFTER the disclosures of Dixon Latrobe I could no longer tell myself that the affairs of the middle western city to which I had recently come did not concern me directly, for I felt pledged to observe Dan Meredith. I did not need to be told that if I fulfilled the pledge I would have to abandon my comfortable indifference, but so eager was I to please Dixon that this did not seem a hardship.

The afternoon following the appearance of Miss Fife I went to the office of the *Herald* with an eagerness I had never known. I wanted to begin I did not know exactly what. Information was my great need. I saw now that I knew much less about Meredith than I should. Fortunately, I did not need to delay a beginning for there was help in the *Herald* office.

My editorial chief was not the journalistic member of that trio of old men in the Atlantic City café. That antique ornament of the profession had died before I arrived in Empire, and I was employed by his successor, John Fordyce, hired by the executor of the old man's will to manage the paper for the widow.

I liked Fordyce. He had no illusions about the *Herald* or any other paper; and for this reason the men of Empire did not know what to make of him. They could not understand a newspaper man who could be



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anything but solemn about his own mystery. They admired him but they were a little afraid. They were used to the old man, Easter P. Landers, who had been owner as well as editor of the paper, a Republican who had believed as late as 1916, the year of his death, that people actually read editorials on the tariff. I had heard that Landers' father, one of Empire's pioneer money-lenders, had been forced to take the *Herald* by foreclosing a mortgage, thus becoming by the exigencies of business one with Dana, Bennett, Greeley and Henry Watterson. His son, who must have been an actor in the seaside resort scene, had inherited the paper, and with it the delusion that he belonged among those he considered the great editors.

The paper had been very moral under the two Landers, particularly the latter. Fordyce had told me that while he had not known Landers he inferred from reading editorials in the files that if the old man had been a human being at all he must have lived in the constant desire of finding courage enough to break the cardinal rules of morality preached by him in the paper. This comment had come back to my mind as Dixon was giving me the café incident in the drama of Dan Meredith and Laurel Fife. The two things checked.

What I wanted to know now was Fordyce's opinion of Meredith and the other Harding men who were distinguished at that time by being the only ones who couldn't see that the Republicans would be forced to nominate Hiram Johnson. If Fordyce gave me that

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opinion he would inevitably say something significant about Meredith; so when he looked from behind the *Chicago Tribune*, in which he was reading his morning comics in regular Empire fashion, I asked him if there really was anything in the Harding movement.

His mouth twitched. He often made me feel as though my questions were elementary.

"Of course there's something in it; Harding's the ideal Republican candidate, isn't he?"

"I thought the Republicans needed somebody to carry the West and prevent another third party. Only yesterday we had an editorial about groups that showed signs of revolting."

He laughed and closed his paper.

"That's all right for April when we're having weather that makes people imagine they could revolt. But you go to the convention in Chicago and watch the brothers sweat in the Coliseum and hobble up Wabash Avenue in their store shoes. Harding is the kind of fellow to be nominated by delegates who want to give it to some safe candidate and get home."

"Then Dan Meredith knows what he is doing?"

"If you call going along quietly with Seneca Giles knowing what he is doing,—yes. If you want to account for Dan this year, study Seneca. My guess is Seneca is getting ready to run Dan for something. Old Giles' approval means Dan is safe and regular, for Giles is the kind of Republican who expects the country to come to its senses some day and revert to the standards of the McKinley period. The Roosevelt break in

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1912 was a greater crime to him than the sinking of the *Lusitania*. They tell me that didn't affect him at all, but when he thinks of Roosevelt he flies into a rage. Czolgoszcz' crime wasn't in killing McKinley but in making Roosevelt president."

I knew Seneca Giles, a lawyer who was spoken of as the Republican dictator of the county. I wondered if he could have been another of Laurel's three old men.

After I left Fordyce, battering out the next day's editorials on his old typewriter, I found on my desk a penciled note from the city editor saying Dan Meredith had telephoned that he now had the arrangements for Senator Harding's visit to Empire and would like to see me about them. So, feeling I was making some progress in my quest for truth, I hurried to the building where Meredith's name adorned three doors.

The girl in the reception-room said I was to go in at once, so in a moment I was shaking hands with Meredith and three others in his private office, a great corner room overlooking the public square. Two of the guests I knew: a lawyer of about fifty-five named Benedict Hightower, known about town as Benny; and Corey Atchison, a younger man with pouchy cheeks, pendulous stomach, and flabby hands that seemed when shaken to contain no bones. The third guest at the party was a tall thin young man of about thirty with a curious, premature stoop. He was introduced by Dan simply as Mr. Marberry of the state capital. Later everybody was calling him Jack.

Meredith's mahogany flat-topped desk, covered with

plate glass, was serving as a table on which stood a quart flask of whisky, a half-dozen bottles of ginger ale, a bowl of ice, and some tumblers. This was the first year of prohibition, and good liquor was not confined in cities like Empire, as it was later, to sheriffs, prosecuting attorneys, judges, corporation presidents and newspaper men. Dan had come from behind the desk to greet me and now led me to a chair beside his.

"Benny," he said to Hightower, "Pour the representative of the press a very large and invigorating drink. Coming from the leading dry newspaper of the state, he will demand quantity as well as quality."

He had us exactly right. We were very dry in all our utterances; but from our veteran editor, Fordyce, through the force, we included a number of finished and consistent drinkers. I was not one; nature had limited my capacity and had therefore practically unfitted me for the life of a successful political reporter. I was almost no good at a state convention, where the hotel rooms usually were devoted to singing and drinking, especially if the wet and dry question were being debated fiercely in the committees or in the convention hall.

Benny Hightower, urbane, almost distinguished, with a shock of white hair by which he was identified all over Illyria, handed me a highball with a mock bow and flourish.

"Desiring to include that powerful friend of the people, that foe of iniquity in high places, that journalistic triumph known as the *Empire Herald*, in our de-

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liberations, we invite you to drink to the next President of the United States, that peerless statesman, Warren G. Harding."

They all rattled their empty tumblers on the desk almost immediately, but I took advantage of my newspaper prerogative to sip mine. I knew I might be there a long time. This might be the opening of the first great drinking party of the campaign.

The telephone bell tinkled now. As Meredith responded, Hightower said to me in a mellow aside, "This crowd will just be getting over the inauguration this time next year."

"You don't mean you're taking Harding seriously? In the states that have primaries it's either Johnson or Leonard Wood. Harding will have difficulty in the Ohio primary. He won't run third in Illyria."

"So much the better. All we want him in any preference primary for is to perfect the record and keep anybody from saying he wouldn't go on the state ballots. He's no good in the primaries; that's true. But he's the perfect type for a convention, and that's the kind we want."

"But what about the other states? What about Boies Penrose and the Pennsylvania delegation?"

Benny Hightower smiled. "Boies isn't so hard to please in a candidate. If he can keep everybody he hates from getting it he won't be critical."

Something mysterious and unexplained about Benny Hightower's political existence made me respect his opinion. These men might be in the unique position of

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being right, with the Johnson, Lowden and Wood followers vocal, consciously virtuous, but deluded.

"The country really wants somebody like Harding," Hightower added. "His election will be another Armistice Day."

I couldn't help hearing Meredith saying at the telephone:

"I'm sorry, dear; you'll have to go without me. I was going to call you and tell you I wouldn't be home for dinner. I've an important conference,—business of the Senator, you know."

I could see Alice Meredith at the transmitter in her Madison Boulevard house. Her husband was rocking on his heels as he stood talking to her, and, as he listened to her replies, he smoked a cigarette in nervous intakes and twice reached for his highball glass. He wore a smile of polite attention and his voice, as he stuck to his refusal to join some party or other, was like satin.

I can't account for the perversity that led me to want Dan to win this telephone test of wills. I knew Mrs. Meredith only on sight. She was a daughter of J. P. Overton, whose grandfather had established about 1840 the business that was now the city's leading department store. The Overtons were one of our oldest families, the section of the country being distinctly post-Jackson. Their antiquity was brought before the people periodically by the store's anniversary sales, J. P. having managed to calculate, by ignoring a number of temporary suspensions, due to bankruptcies,

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the history of the business from the beginning. One Empire hostess had remarked to me that the eightieth anniversary sale at Overton's in 1917 was a greater event, judging by the newspapers, than the declaration of war. She pointed out that in the stress of wartimes the store seemed to have gained three years.

Alice Meredith had inherited her portion of the Overton family uncertainty of their title to exclusiveness. This congenital trait, I am convinced, is what compelled her and the rest of the Overtons to pay so much painful attention to form and ceremony. It was as if they kept telling themselves they were of a family of great merchant princes though they knew they came of country store-keepers grown large through the natural increase in the number of consumers.

Mrs. Dan Meredith was socially right in Empire through the Overtons. Dan himself brought nothing of that kind to the connection. His father had managed to convince himself that he was a professional man, but he had never amounted to much; and he had obligingly died at the right time, freeing Dan to be a member of the Madison Boulevard set without embarrassing entanglements on the South Side. The alliance had given Dan a home such as his realtor father would have described in the classified advertisements as palatial. Since the newspapers did not fail to identify Dan by his relationship he was always certain of his political speeches and maneuvers being adequately reported. Even a newspaper hostile to his faction would be polite. But in spite of his connections, he insisted

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on being known as a man of the people: His name on his door read DAN MEREDITH, LAWYER, instead of DANIEL SCOTT MEREDITH, ATTORNEY AT LAW.

After the telephone conflict, Dan mixed himself another drink and consumed it in two swallows, as if he wanted to bring himself quickly into a new state of mind. He must have caught and remembered a word or two of my conversation with Benny Hightower, for he turned to me with a lawyer's court-room frown, his voice rising above normal pitch.

"We're bringing Senator Harding here for a speech next week. Just put it down,—the eighteenth, High School Auditorium, eight o'clock. May be fifty or five hundred to hear him; doesn't matter. It's for the sake of the record. You'll be listening to the next President of the United States."

"I had better go over to the office and turn the story in."

I saw Dan was beginning to feel what he had drunk; Hightower and Atchison were notorious for their political debauches. I had no desire to attend an all-night session in Meredith's office. Dan's speech had thickened noticeably.

"Telephone it, my boy, and have another drink. Make use of Ed'son's priceless gift to humanity,—Ed'son's or Samuel F. B. X. Y. Z. Morse's, I forget which. Benny, who invented telephone? Anyhow, use it; tell 'em Harding's coming and you'll be in later. Tell 'em closeted with the Honorable Benedict Hightower. Be my guest at dinner."



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He had had another. Benny looked at the inscrutable Marberry, sitting folded up in a corner, and winked. Atchison, also slightly drunk, went to the desk and began pouring another round. Suddenly he paused and stood glaring at Meredith, bottle in hand.

"Dan," he growled, "I wish you would not bring in these extran—extraneous matters, such as Edison. Next thing you'll be citing Henry Ford. Let's confine our discussion to subjects in hand. You widen field too much."

"Forgive me, Corey. You must forgive me. Your respected father would insist. Let me call him up and ask him. I haven't heard your old father's voice for two, three weeks. Let me ask him if you'll forgive me for widening field."

I wondered who Atchison's father was. Marberry, stirring in his corner and flashing a smile toward me, remarked, "Time to sing, ain't it?"

Dan wheeled and devoured him with outraged dignity.

"Pardon me, Mr. Marberry; ev'dently you fail to comprehend amenities of political conference in Empire. I trust you do not mean invidious insinuation. Never sing before dinner; always discuss. Sing later."

Marberry was now going toward the door. "I've got to get away on the five-thirty," he explained. "I'd like Benny to come with me to the station; some things we've got to arrange."

Dan followed him, glass in hand.

"Trust you do not feel I rebuked you with un' n-

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coming harshness," he rambled on, his alcohol enlarging his bearing at every word. "But as you are representing Senator Harding in Illyria I thought you would desire familiarity with etiquette of Empire. Never sing before dinner; just discuss. Tell Harding that."

Marberry laughed and drew Hightower to the door. "We'll sing in Chicago at the convention, won't we?"

Dan would have gone with them had not Marberry, with adroitness that suggested experience, directed his attention to Atchison and dodged out with Hightower.

At seven o'clock, having telephoned an explanation to the office, I went to dinner with Dan. Atchison, taking the grand departure of the drunken, regretted, with many repetitions, irksome engagements elsewhere. I drove Dan in his car to a lunchroom on the edge of the city, opposite the railroad station, a resort of the very poor and the very rich. There he was evidently well known, for the bloated proprietor hastened to pay us the compliment of preparing with his own hands the kind of steaks named with gloomy dignity by my companion.

"Like masculine simplicity; plain food in abundance. No table-cloths or napkins,—back to the primitive."

While we were waiting for the clatter, sizzling and odors of the coop-like kitchen to materialize in food, Dan sat in depressed silence. He had been talking, gesticulating, smoking and drinking for three hours; he had a right to go tired suddenly. I was weary from the battering of the political harangues in Meredith's

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office. I decided to suggest a long ride after dinner and end by taking Dan home.

But I did not appreciate the physical and mental resources of my man. He brightened when the steaks were placed before us, explaining the peculiar virtues of the aproned waiter he addressed as Al and praising the quality of the cooking. While we ate he developed the theme of the desirability of knowing such out-of-the-way places and of cultivating intimacies among such characters as Al, whose history he related with detail and emphasis that suggested admiration for the career of soldier, cowboy, seaman, tramp and circus canvasman. Al, it seemed, had been these things rather than follow conventional pursuits in obedience to a well-to-do father in Dallas.

At half past eight, with Dan apparently sober, I began to think of seeing him on his way home, but when we left Al and his ponderous, beery employer I saw he had other plans.

"I want to drop in on some of my friends out on the East Side," he remarked, taking the wheel. "Some parts of Empire you ought to know better. A couple of hours on the East Side won't hurt you."

I knew these parts well enough. I suspected Dan was more intent on a round of the prohibition saloons, operated as soft drink places, than on my education. Such a round began at once, with the roadster parked in front of one bootlegger's after another and us sitting at a series of back-room tables while he drank himself into the night.

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There was nothing to do now but stay with him; at the pace he began he would soon need an escort. But in the fourth saloon, about half past one, it struck me that for several purchases now he had not been gulping his liquor but had been letting it sit while he talked. He seemed to want to hold himself on the edge of drunkenness, experimenting with the stage he had reached. He might have desired to be neither drunk nor sober, but in a phase between where he was protected from reality without being in need of help. He was being systematic; that was the explanation.

"I suppose you wonder why I brought you along tonight," he said as we were traveling between saloons over the dark tortuous streets. "I don't like your paper; you know that. I don't need to like any paper. When the time comes I can get what I want without those editorials that are supposed to get votes for the ticket. I'll tell you why I brought you along. I envy your way of life. You're just about the age I was when I started to practise law here, and you're free to make your own way. I'm about eight years older than you, I guess, but once in a while I feel as young, when I get to thinking about those times before I started. I want a friend who isn't after something,—a young fellow."

I didn't reply for I didn't want to divert him. When we were seated again in a dim back room Dan continued:

"I never wanted to practise law in the first place. I want to tell somebody that; somebody who won't take advantage. I didn't want to get into politics. But I'm

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in both. That's the way it goes in this glorious land of opportunity . . . to make mistakes."

He stared at me as if questioning my capacity as a confidant.

"I didn't want to do what I'm doing now. Why am I doing it? That's not the point. I'll tell you one thing, though; away back the year I began the fellows who run things in this county and divide everything in the state told me that I was slated for a future. They said I could be governor when the time came. It's working out that way. I'm going to be somebody in this state. The funny part of it is I've got everything,—a home, an income and prospects; and most of the time I guess I'm satisfied and sometimes I'm happy; then other times I hate everything I've got and everything I'm doing. Then I get a gang together and we have some drinks."

He took a drink now, a larger one than he had taken for three hours.

"I get afraid sometimes,—afraid that if I do get to be governor, or senator, I won't be any happier than I am now. A man could be president in this country, the way we work things, and still have a misspent life."

There was nothing I could say to that without giving a hint of my special knowledge of his earlier life; so I remained silent. The clock over Dan's head said three; and, to see how he felt, I suggested calling it a day.

"Tired, aren't you?" he asked, and was immediately concerned that he had kept me up all night. "I'll call

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Fordyce in the morning and explain that I kidnaped you. But you're on a morning paper; you can sleep all day. Let's have one more and we'll go."

He spoke gently, adding, "I shouldn't have brought you out here to bore you with my troubles."

He was in earnest about the drink; he dispatched his with a gesture of finality and we went out to the car. "You drive," he said. "Drive into the country and let's watch the sun rise."

At dawn we were bearing back toward Empire on a highway bordered by fields where spring plowing was under way. As we passed one field of fine straight furrows a farmer's boy was hooking three horses to a plow.

"That's what I'd like to do,—work a big farm," Dan observed. "The round of the seasons . . . planting, harvesting, planning, handling animals and men . . . stop her and let me speak to that boy."

We got out of the car and went over to the fence, Meredith fumbling in his pocket. When the puzzled farm boy came to where we stood Dan handed him a dollar bill, saying:

"Next time you go to town take yourself to a movie."

The boy held the bill in his hand, looking blankly at his strange gift as our car shot down the road. We had gone a mile or so in silence when Dan asked me to turn at the next side-road and drive back to the farm boy we had just left. He did not explain why, and I confess I was wondering what he meant when he again climbed out and waved to the plowboy to come to the fence.

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"Excuse me, son. I never realized till I got way down the road that it was an insult to give you a dollar. Take this instead."

He had taken a twenty from the roll he always carried in his trousers pocket and pressed it into the boy's hand.

When we returned to the machine he took the wheel and drove rapidly into town and to my rooming house without alluding to the present. After shaking hands gravely and assuring me he would call Fordyce and explain my absence he sped in the direction of Madison Boulevard as the clock on the court-house boomed out five.

## CHAPTER IV

I EXPECTED to be in touch with Meredith in the fashion of a newspaper reporter, but I was not prepared for the sequel to our night among the bootleggers. Newspaper people below the rank of owner do not expect to be taken in socially by their down-town contacts, so I was surprised and a little embarrassed to be called on the telephone by Mrs. Meredith the day after the Harding meeting in the Empire High School and asked to come to dinner the next evening. I could not help being amused by the way in which she gave away her uncertainty about me, for she included in her invitation the information that, "We are informal; just a dinner jacket." Of course she might have feared I would arrive at "The Elms" in a clawhammer and silk hat, but I decided she had taken that transparent method of making certain that an outsider would not come to her table in a business suit.

It suggested something. Dan had asked her to invite me; had probably interpreted me to her. But a dinner list was a weightier matter to her than to him, for she was still an Overton. She was one of those women who preserve their original identities after marriage more successfully than members of the Lucy Stone League. They never marry into a family; they make their husbands appendages of their own.



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With the dinner coat thus stressed I smiled, thinking of the informality of the companionable Senator I had interviewed through a half-open bathroom door in the Midland while he splashed in our famous artesian water.

Mr. Harding was the easiest of candidates to interview. He and Benedict Hightower, who had him in charge in Empire, made things pleasant for the reporters. The rainy night and the assurance of a small audience for his speech made no difference to the Senator or his local sponsors, which impressed me again with something I had noted earlier in his campaign,—something understood about his candidacy. That he was not trying for delegates in the preferential primaries to any extent was thought of as a good omen by his supporters. The men who were to go into the Chicago convention with blocks of instructed delegates would kill one another off, Hightower explained, giving me an impromptu lecture on the fallacy of the primary system. The available compromise would be selected by a small group of dictators after the favorite sons had worn themselves out on the early ballots.

"A favorite son in a primary is apt to be a poor step-child in a convention," was the way he put it. And I had heard enough of Hightower's political sense to infer there was more in the Harding candidacy than appeared on the surface.

"Nobody is taking us seriously just now," he went on, "and that is just what we want. You only have to look over the racing news to know that favorites have a

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habit of running the other way when the barrier goes up. If Warren was going strong in the newspapers right now we'd be scared."

The evening with Harding and his friends made me feel that my political education up to that time had been extremely elementary. The first lesson to be learned, apparently, was that things were seldom what they seemed. Large audiences and flights of oratory, followed by long reports in the papers and sapient editorials, were the stage properties of spectacular candidates whose campaigns would be stifled in a neat and satisfactory manner as soon as the convention got down to business.

It was hard for me to believe, but it seemed to be a fact, that the Harding group wanted none of the publicity that was being heaped upon Johnson and Leonard Wood. Instead it was to be shunned. That night in the Midland Senator Harding acted as if he knew he was to be the man.

At "The Elms," where I appeared on the stroke of seven, with Mrs. Meredith's repetition of the hour well remembered, I saw at once I was to have a view of Dan Meredith in the society to which he had been elected by marriage. Among the twelve guests who were standing around the correctly commonplace drawing-room when dinner was announced was none of Dan's political associates. With the exception of myself the list had all been drawn from the best people.

Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Overton—"Mama and Papa"—

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were there, of course. They went to all of Alice Meredith's dinners, and she went to theirs. She had not, I supposed, taken her mama and papa with her on her honeymoon, but they would have been capable of going. Alice, I decided before the evening was over, was dominated by her mama, a short, fat, babyish, pouting woman of about fifty-five. Her father was pallid, thin and white-haired, the perfect dry-goods man, one whose portrait would have served as that of the oldest employee of a corporation. Putting a dinner coat on J. P. Overton did not make him any the less the yard-goods salesman. Between courses he would run his finger along the cloth absent-mindedly as if appraising the grade of linen. I expected to see him take a pair of scissors from his vest pocket and begin cutting.

Mr. and Mrs. Howard Failer were there; and it was Mr. Failer who made the table conversation general by alluding to the decadence of the theater. It seemed he and Mrs. Failer had gone to *Nightfall* and had come away offended, not because they were clever enough to see it was a dull and improbable play but for moral reasons.

"I don't know what we are coming to in this country when you can't go to the theater without having to listen to profanity," he lisped to nobody in particular; and before I could stop myself I said I hadn't noticed any in *Nightfall*. "Why," he asked, "didn't you hear that woman say 'Damn it'?"

"That woman" had been Laurel Fife. The rest of the company seemed to agree with Mr. Failer, and so the

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drama was disposed of on the strength of the line, "Damn it."

"They say," went on the speaker, "that somebody is going to produce a play about a preacher or missionary, and that it's going to be full of swearing. There ought to be a law against that. What's going to become of us if plays like that can be put on?"

With Dan, who had been an actor in the most realistic scenes in Laurel's life, sitting there looking down his table, I fell into a trance, wondering about him and his affairs. I was stirred out of it by the voice of A. P. Newsome. Mr. Newsome was president of a motor truck company. He had not seen the play complained of by Mr. Failer; he said he liked a good musical comedy once in a while, but he seldom went to what he called a drama. He thought a greater cause for anxiety than the low state of the theater was the determination of labor to keep wages at the war levels.

"I wonder how many of you know how close we are to Bolshevism at this very minute?" he asked.

Nobody knew, I was sure; not even Mr. Newsome. But there was a turning of faces in his direction and Mrs. Newsome, who was on my left, said to me, "Alexander is greatly worried about Bolshevism. All the leading manufacturers are."

The comment of his tired-looking, gray-haired woman in flame-colored silk made me think of the endurance such wives possess. She must have had to listen to her husband's dissertation on Bolshevism scores of times since the fall of the Czar.

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While the company was fearing the red menace for the moment I took the opportunity to look at our host. He had taken no part in the conversation, but was leaning against the high back of his chair playing with a fork, and gazing musingly at the delectable shoulders of Miss Millicent Tener, on his left. I knew Miss Tener from her picture that appeared occasionally on the society page of the *Herald*. She was a small brunette of the smoldering type, an orphan grandchild of Fowler P. Evans, of the First and Second National Bank and Union Trust Company. In her middle twenties, Miss Tener was the custodian of a disturbing beauty that made me concede that watching her, as Dan was, and exchanging a word now and then, was a better occupation than listening to what the others were saying.

After Mr. Newsome had stated the nation's danger in terms of communism, which he seemed to think was identical with socialism, Mr. Gerald Marvin thought everybody would be astonished if the truth were told about the Ku Klux Klan. The inference was that he could tell it. Robert N. Brill, junior, the other bachelor present, thought the Klan was more political than anything else, whatever that meant, and he said it would die if the newspapers would stop exaggerating it. He evidently had been asked to balance Miss Tener, with whom I had heard him connected. Looking at him and listening to him tell how the newspapers should handle the Klan, I began to see justification for Millicent's delay in announcing the engagement, which had been giving our society editor some concern. Mr. Brill, I

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had gathered, was well-to-do, a sort of gentleman realtor.

As an accidental guest, I felt free to deduce that Meredith was living in two worlds,—the one into which he had married and the one in which I had recently observed him. He had seemed far more natural and much more at ease in the latter.

The other guest had to be an unattached woman if balance were to be preserved, and she proved to be a Miss Helen Cummings, a gay, golden-haired girl of about forty who astonished me by contributing the literary note to the evening. Miss Cummings joined the symposium on the state of the Union by saying our great tragedy was our trashy literature and the failure of publishers to discover and bring out the finer things. Our writers were being corrupted by money, selling their birthrights, as I gathered from her, for a mess of motion pictures. The lovers of beauty, who could save the people if given a chance, could not compete in such a commercial battle. "Still," she concluded with a sigh, "it has always been that way. Think of poor Keats . . ."

Mrs. Newsome whispered to me, "Helen writes, you know."

So we had heard between appetizer and salad what was wrong with the country. Mr. Overton now inquired, as he would have inquired if there was anything else he could show the lady to-day, if anybody present had heard Senator Harding the other night.

"This party," his daughter interjected, "would have

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been night before last, but Dan had to be at that stupid political meeting. He is on the Harding committee, you know."

Nobody but Meredith and I, of those at the table, had been there, it developed.

"Lowden's got it," said Mr. Newsome. "The business interests and the farmers all want him. Elect Lowden and that's the end of Bolshevism in this country."

Mrs. Newsome whispered to me, "Alexander says Governor Lowden is just as good as elected now. He is close to a lot of men in Washington."

Mr. Failer said Mr. Lowden was strong, but he had an idea Leonard Wood would get it. "A military man would get the soldier vote."

Mr. Brill, who, I learned afterward, had spent the war years in the Internal Revenue Bureau in Washington, said the soldiers would never vote for a soldier; furthermore, they would never fight another war. He knew how they felt. "I think Hiram Johnson's the strongest candidate. It's got to be a western man."

Johnson was, of course, as far west as they could go.

"What does our newspaper friend think of it?" Mrs. Meredith asked, evidently thinking this was a good time to satisfy her husband by a little attention to me. "Of course, you may not want to tell; you newspaper men are always carrying around important secrets, aren't you?"

"Well," I hesitated, thinking more of her banal remark about newspaper men as repositories of secrets than about the presidential situation, "I hadn't thought

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so till recently, but since the Harding meeting here I begin to believe he's going to be nominated."

"But everybody says the meeting was a failure. Only about a hundred there and the auditorium holds two thousand."

"I know. It doesn't sound sensible. But that's the way I feel."

I didn't have to continue. A gothic mold of strawberry ice-cream had been placed before Mrs. Meredith, and everybody turned away from me and watched her cut it.

In fact, there wasn't much more talk than that at the table. Mrs. Meredith's dinner was too alluring. A butler and two waitresses were on duty, and they were kept busy. Eating was a serious business; and even the ethereal Miss Cummings thrust, cut and speared competently. The commercialization of American literature had not impaired her appetite.

Only Dan was indifferent. Having seen him eat beef-steak in that all-night restaurant across from the railroad station, I could not help contrasting his attitudes. To-night he scarcely touched his plate. Sometimes he would fix his eyes on a speaker with a fragment of his rather theatrical platform smile, but soon his attention would flag and he would resume his detachment. He looked like a man counting the words, almost the swallows and bites, until the party should rise and move out to the drawing-room. If he had crumpled his napkin at his plate and walked out of the room, leaving his guests sitting, I would not have been surprised.



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I could not understand why he did not make a greater effort out of common politeness. But he did not, and I can set his behaviour down only as it appeared to me, a stranger to the scene.

There was no talk during the ice-cream, so it occurs to me to interject, in the time required for its consumption, a brief accounting for my presence in Empire. I had come to take a vacant place on the *Herald* obtained through an employment bureau. In the enchanted year of 1919—it is Hugh Walpole's phrase, not mine—I had had some vague impressions of the opportunities offered by the industrial cities of Illyria. At least I had heard them mentioned favorably by men making plans for locating after demobilization. And so I had decided to make Empire my home. In my short residence there I had seen the sides of life usually open to the reporters, getting impressions of its business and politics, but until to-night I had never met the people in their homes. Knowing what I did of Meredith, I now saw some reason for erratic performances like his flight among the bootleggers. He might have been protesting unconsciously against the dullness and inanities of his wife's friends. I recalled him refusing over the telephone to go with her to some other dinner. Seeing a century of evenings like this, in his own and in other people's houses, Dan would inevitably protest, if unconsciously, in his own way.

I wondered about another kind of protest, watching Alice Meredith in the drawing-room among her guests. Married only three years—I had picked up the fact of

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their wedding of 1917, year of many quick marriages—she looked more than her twenty-seven years. She might have been born middle-aged, born a matron; to me she seemed always peering unhappily about to see what was out of place. Just now, standing before a mantel with Mr. Newsome, she reached past his shoulder and moved a candlestick an inch. The mantel and every other point of interest in the room was decorated in pairs of things, each pair flanking a larger object. I suspected that the flanked picture or ornament had to be precisely on center or Alice Meredith would go mad. This emphasis on arrangement and care of objects of use and decoration I observed afterward was not confined to Alice Meredith. It was rather wide-spread, one Empire philosopher explaining that it was due to the exaggeration of the importance of possessions following the deprivations of the pioneer period.

Alice was a tall pale blonde, with shoulder and elbow angles. Apparently she did nothing to look well. She must have reached into a closet, snatched down a dress, hung it on her frame and come down-stairs. So far as creating an effect to complement the impulses of Dan toward life and beauty was concerned she must have been incapable of conceiving it. To me the situation was impossible. I could see how it had begun; I could not see how it could go on.

Dan was so thoroughly alive, so invigorating to look at, so likable in his crudeness, so different from these lay figures now cluttering his house, that I had the delightful mental picture of him opening the front door

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presently and casting them bodily, one by one, into Madison Boulevard. What he should do with Alice afterward I did not know; I could not complete the picture. He might walk off and leave her. But he couldn't do that. He had to stay in Empire properly married and be ready to run for governor. An ordinary citizen could rearrange his affairs intelligently and in a sanitary manner. Not so a politician. The voters were supposed to abhor men who could not get along with their wives. I wondered if a man who had left his wife could be governor of Illyria. I decided not. He might steal, or wreck a bank, or surround himself with criminals in office; but he might as well come out against prohibition before election as disclose a conflict with the woman to whom he was yoked.

Dan was now sitting with Millicent Tener on a long sofa. Millicent's posture precluded interruption. She obviously did not see or hear anybody in the room but Dan, and she gave notice that she did not intend to. She was turning an expression designed for childlike absorption, her delicately touched lips and her eyebrows registering the point in what he was saying. He evidently was relating some real or fancied political adventure, for she showed alarm, concern, disbelief and finally brittle glee, laughing at his conclusion and patting her much-tended hands together.

I saw my host eying her now in an estimating manner. She did have a large portion of the routine physical allure of the kind that would tempt a man like Meredith in his off moments. She might be a recreation. If

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he were what I was beginning to think he was he would not give her a thought except when his position was closing in on him and he was face to face with the proposition of failure in everything in life except political power. Some day, felled fine by having to be polite to the J. P. Overtons, he might, through no particular callousness toward Alice, drop in on Millicent.

Of course, the whole thing depended upon whether Dan actually knew and understood what had happened to him, or whether he merely felt its effects periodically and lashed out without knowing why. This was the enigma. I lacked the determining clue. I was not sure what Laurel Fife, the only person who had really loved him, thought. He had had his best moments with Laurel eight years before. What had become of the Dan Meredith of those days?

Two tables of bridge had developed, leaving the poetess and Millicent, Brill and myself, standing or sitting about. Dan and Millicent had now been talking on the sofa long enough for our hostess, who came striding up to me and said she wanted Dan to show me his books. Then, with her arm through mine, she appeared before her husband and told him to take me to his study, remarking in explanation that she hadn't had a word with Millicent and Miss Cummings all evening. Millicent did not speak or smile, relinquishing Dan to me without pretending she welcomed the exchange of companionship. As he and I went into the hall and up the stairs I saw Mrs. Meredith arranging her group. I did not envy Brill his position as squire of three indi-

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viduals, two of whom were in a bad humor to begin with.

As Mrs. Meredith had spoken of books I expected Dan to lead me to the only civilized room in the house. I thought, here now the real man will come out, for he has a room that expresses himself. A man reveals his true character in his recreations, says the Chinese proverb. But Dan's room added nothing to my knowledge of him.

It was a small museum or display alcove of inferior subscription sets all neatly encased behind glass. The volumes had been laid up in rows as by a skilled mason. One would as soon have taken tools and tried to dislodge a tile from the fireplace as a book from one of the rows. There were many colors among the bindings but not the pale tobacco of old sheep. There were no single volumes or occasional books. It was a stage setting.

"There they are," said Dan, standing by the study table and opening a box of cigars. "Look at them if you care to. Of course, you can see the same thing on a larger scale in any good store. I didn't buy them; they came with the place. A man is supposed to have a study and a collection of books just as a house is supposed to have a water softener; so Mrs. Meredith and her mother provided this."

He uttered this surprising speech in a low even voice, full of bitterness. I said nothing, wishing to give him a chance to let the admission pass if it were an accident. He had, however, spoken with intent. Dropping into a

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chair that matched the table and motioning me to its companion, he went on:

"I want to apologize for bringing you into this. It would be a damned shame for you to join this crowd even if they'd take you in. I don't belong in it. Don't let the Tener girl get her hooks into you,—she begins by asking you to tell her about your work; that's the sign. There are a dozen other girls your age that dangle on the families of our set; you'd meet them in time. But you've got your freedom and your job. What do you want to put your head in a noose for? You don't; I can see that. But I got Alice to ask you out here, so it's my duty to warn you. There's something wrong with this generation; the ones before them were all right,—the people who made the town. They left their children too much money. Take the young men,—take Brill; what's he worth, apart from his family? Who'd pay him a hundred a month? I shouldn't talk; I married it."

He paused in this disjointed indictment of his friends, lighting his cigar and looking at me with an expression of angry inquiry. Plainly, a lot of things were the matter with my friend but he didn't know what. He added:

"Did you ever sit and study over something you had done hastily, trying to justify yourself? There's a scar inside me. I made a decision once, a decision almost anybody would have made in my place, and everything has worked out just as I was sure it would. I've got or will get everything that was in the bargain. But when

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I try to remember all the facts I'm not satisfied. It bothers me and slows me up. I'm afraid I did wrong somewhere. I'm not sure of myself."

I hesitated, studying him as he sat there, a figure of unhappiness. Dan Meredith certainly was not ruthless enough for a politician if he was a victim of remorse.

"Did this decision of yours concern anybody else?"

He looked at me sharply. "How did you guess it?" he asked.

"I just applied a simple rule of psychology. You've been acting as if you were worried about the effect of your choice on somebody else." He hadn't, particularly, but I wanted to lead him into an admission.

He laughed. "Psychoanalyzing me, huh? Well go ahead."

I was trying to speak calmly, to decide how far to go.

"This decision that's on your mind . . . was it made in Atlantic City?"

Dan rose and towered above me, his face stern.

"So that's why you and I've seemed so close! I knew I felt different toward you. You know about that?"

"Not much. I know something; one side."

He reached down and took me by the shoulder. He was so aroused I would not have been surprised if he had shaken me.

"You know the other side. That's the only one you could know. So you must know who she was. What was her name . . . I've never known."

I ignored his hand and got to my feet. I was Dan's friend but I had other interests to protect. I did not

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intend to have any confidences with him without an understanding.

"I can't tell you unless you give me your word not to communicate with her or let her know you have identified her until I say so. You must remember she has some rights."

"Boy, I'll protect you." It was the politician speaking. Detestably but naturally he had jumped to the conclusion that I was anxious to guard against a rebuke for a breach of confidence,—that I was playing safe.

"I don't give a damn for your protection. I'm thinking about her. I've got to see that you don't write to her,—look her up."

"All right; on my honor."

"Her name was Laurel Fife."

He drew back. "Not Laurel Fife . . . but of course, she said she was going to be an actress and, by God, she would be. That girl would be whatever she set her mind on. Laurel Fife! Say! Wasn't she in town the other day? Yes, she was; she was here in a show."

"Certainly she was in town. Remember, I asked you in the hotel lobby if you were going to see her? The name didn't mean anything to you."

"She was in town, and I never knew it."

He sat down weakly, wholly relaxed, staring at nothing. It was evident to me that we were rather close now to what ailed Dan Meredith. I went hunting cigarettes on the table, wondering how much I would have to tell him, now that I had laid myself open to his questions.

As I lighted my cigarette, I turned to him in alarm.



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People were coming down the hall, others to see Dan's books.

"Damn these people!" he muttered, sitting up and running a hand over his rumpled hair. "Keep an eye on me, and when I slip away you follow. We can't serve anything to these fanatics down-stairs, but I'll give you a highball in the pantry. And we've got to talk. I'll call you up. We'll go for a drive."

"Where are you two hiding?" trilled Miss Cummings from the doorway. "Millicent and I said we weren't afraid to trail you to your lair."

I believed that. Millicent and Miss Cummings weren't afraid of anything. I escaped down-stairs at once and left Dan to his fate.

I didn't get the highball. The forces of Empire society were too strong for me. The best Dan could do was to hold me to the last and then follow me to the porch after I had said good night to his wife. Out there he shook hands and said, "You know, I feel better, knowing who she was and that she has gone 'way up. She is pretty well up, isn't she?"

"Dan!" Mrs. Meredith was calling from the open door. "Move that plant about a foot to your right before you come in, will you?"

I looked back from the driveway as I was getting into my old car. He was standing looking out across the garden. Two or three lights were switched off in the house behind him. Alice was putting things in order for the night.

Fumbling with my keys, I saw Dan staring down at

the potted shrub he had been told to move. I thought for a minute he was going to push it off the ledge with his foot, to smash on the cement below. But he didn't. He stooped and lifted the bulky ugly thing to where his wife desired it, and then went heavily into the house.

It was right that he should. If he had made a deliberate, studied marriage for advantage he had received a fair return. He must have had money and position in view, and his wife had brought him those. He had "married well," and if, as a result, he found himself yoked with an unbeautiful and uncongenial woman, the futile, pitiful Alice, he had only himself to blame.

And there was her plight to be considered. There was something of anachronism about Alice Meredith, as if she were a survival of a day that passed with the war. She must have had a youth, and it couldn't, by simple arithmetic, have been so long ago; yet with her matronliness she was such a contrast to other women of her age, it was difficult to imagine that she had ever been anything but assured and satisfied, a logical product of the family sense of property. She was not, decidedly, modern. You could not picture Alice Meredith forgetful of herself; and a woman would have to be that to envelop the nature of a man like Meredith. Assuming he would go his logical course, Alice might be in for tragedy. No, I concluded, as I drove away; he had no right to smash her porch plants. He had, after all, married them.

## CHAPTER V

I DID not have the expected talk with Meredith right away. A week passed and then another, and he hadn't called me up. This puzzled me at first, but later I came to understand his silence. It was an extension of his action in moving the porch plant carefully in obedience to his wife's querulous directions. He was not ready to hasten chaos. Rebellion by a man situated as he would have been inexplicable to Empire, from the point of view of which Alice was a perfect wife. For him to move in the direction of Laurel would have been simply to invite the coarse superficial accusation of "running after an actress." I could hear Mr. and Mrs. Failer saying that to each other.

In Empire, separation of husbands and wives, where indicated, as the physicians say, was nearly all among the factory mechanics and clerks. Marital wounds in the boulevard classes must have been scarred over. The evils resulting from mismating didn't get into court. Though the statute recognized almost a dozen grounds for divorce and the process was easy and cheap, the fiction of felicity was often ruthlessly maintained by families unwilling to acknowledge their marriages were failures. At this point Dan Meredith probably never thought of freeing himself from the Overtons, which was what a divorce for him would have meant.

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Though I didn't hear from Dan, I had a word from the other side of his case in the form of a letter from Dixon Latrobe. It came early in May, just after I had recovered from the extra work the paper made of the state primary.

This was a curious instrument, thought of by the uncritical as a valuable reform, by which members of the political parties were expected to choose their nominees for state offices and to express, once in four years, their preference for the presidential nominations. In theory it was supposed to frustrate efforts at the party bossism that had thrived when nominations were made exclusively by state conventions.

After what I had seen of Senator Harding's preliminary campaign I was eager to see how he would run in the Republican primary in Illyria. He had squeezed through in his own state, winning the preference in Ohio by a narrow margin over Leonard Wood. In Indiana, shortly thereafter, he had finished fourth. These two primaries checked with what I had been told about Harding, so when the returns were in in Illyria and he was found to stand third, I was more than ever impressed by Benedict Hightower's insistence that he would be nominated in Chicago.

Wood and Johnson were both ahead of Harding in the voting in Illyria, their managers at once falling into a wrangle over which should control the state's delegation to the convention. Hightower said this was almost as good as a nomination for Harding, for, with Wood and Johnson disputing for a delegation as important as

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Illyria's, the party leaders could not let either one of them have it without offense to the supporters of the other. This, he pointed out, was an illustration of how the primary defeated its own purpose and bred party strife. He added that the seventeen thousand votes cast for Harding in Illyria were just the right number.

"Never bet on a favorite for the nomination," he went on. "The surest way is to find out who certain men are for. Men like Penrose."

"They say Penrose is for Knox," I put in.

"Boies always has his water buckets sitting out in case it may rain," was my mentor's comment. "That's what somebody said of Taggart once. Phil Knox can't be nominated. He'd make a pretty fair president and all that, for he knows a lot and he's had experience in the Cabinet and the Senate. Hiram Johnson would veto Knox, just as he vetoed Hughes four years ago. But Knox is from Penrose's state so Boies finds it convenient to be for him at present till he can see how things are going. Too much depends on the Pennsylvania delegation to allow a commitment in advance. Pennsylvania will sit there and vote for Governor Sproul till Penrose tells them different."

I suggested that it looked as though Penrose would not get to Chicago. For once sickness had humbled the saturnine giant from Philadelphia.

"That doesn't make any difference. As long as he's alive the nomination can't be made without his O. K. And Penrose sick is a smarter politician than his enemies in the best of health."

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"From what you say Penrose favors Harding."

"He favors the Harding type."

"It's hard to get,—the direct primary was supposed to end all that."

"My boy, when direct election of senators was put into the constitution didn't people say, that's the end of Penrose? They said the people of Pennsylvania would never send him back. And what happened? He was nominated and reelected by the biggest vote ever cast for a candidate in the state of Pennsylvania. As a matter of fact, the leaders get results by the primary easier and a lot cheaper than they did by the conventions."

The newspapers, however, took the primary returns from the leading states at their face value. Head-lines and editorials spoke of the choice lying among Wood, Johnson and Lowden. Whether this was because the editors were ignorant or, knowing better, preferred to flatter the people in their delusion that they actually had a voice in their nominations through the direct primary, I could not tell.

Some of the hired editors, men like John Fordyce, certainly knew better; but the estate of Easter P. Landers, owning the *Herald*, was more interested in volume of advertising and net profits than in carrying the torch of truth. If Fordyce had gone very far toward realism in his editorials he would have written himself out of a job in a short time. A. P. Newsome, J. P. Overton and others would have gone to the trust officer in charge of the estate and entered charges of Bolshe-

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vism. In 1920 one disposed of anybody one did not like by calling him a Bolshevik.

The *Herald* had the usual Wood-Johnson-Lowden editorials; and after our primary all Fordyce would say was that he wanted me to be ready to go to the Chicago convention with him and count the handkerchiefs used by Bryan in the press-box if it happened to be hot.

"And it's got to be hot," he added. "The leaders have fixed the date at a period when heat is predicted. Delegates are handled best when they're hot, especially farmers who want to go home and cultivate their corn. It's funny,—Bryan can't keep cool and Cabot Lodge can't keep warm. Notice Lodge's white vests,—they stay fresh all day. Poor old Lodge! It must gall him to watch the nomination going to some ignoramus and realize that a man of attainments can't have it. An educated man hasn't a chance this year, after two terms of scholarship in the White House."

Dixon wrote from Des Moines that Laurel was getting ready to close *Nightfall*. When she did, Dixon might go to Chicago, where she was wanted for the summer in an art theater company that was to be subsidized by a group of wealthy women who were worried about the effect on Chicago of the commercial drama.

Dixon illuminated her attitude toward this proposal by writing that she loathed amateur shows, but as she had to work, and Laurel wasn't likely to have another play before December, she was willing to consecrate herself to art for eight weeks or so for a consideration.

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Her light touch in her letters disturbed me. She was gay, impersonal and altogether decisive, giving me the disagreeable feeling that she did not and never would need the protecting arm and the rugged support of the male. Like most slight young men I had always been intensely masculine in my thinking, so, while I was delighted at the expectation of seeing her in Chicago, I resented the situation that permitted her to decide where she was going without deferring to me. The self-sufficient professional woman was a new experience for me. I told myself I didn't care for it, though all the time I had before me my recollection of her gray eyes as they had mused that night in the Midland on Laurel's tragedy.

With characteristic blundering I let her note go without a reply, with some vain notion of suggesting to her that I was very busy; and so, before I had replied, I had another from her confirming the Chicago plans and telling me when she would arrive there.

This letter made a change in me. I had worked myself into believing that the sooner I quit thinking about her the more likely I was to be happy. Not only were the chances remote of seeing her frequently: she couldn't, I believed, imagine anything but a cordial acquaintance on a basis of our joint interest in Laurel and Dan. That I had a sore feeling over being a newspaper nonentity without power to arrest her inner attention was a result of our meeting that I was anxious to conceal, for I knew it could not be explained to her. But while I was humbled by the conviction that



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she was, except for Laurel's business, outside my scope, I was so stirred by the remembrance of her beauty and so drawn by her charm that I began to think of trying to justify my existence by doing something she could admire. She could not admire me; with my straw-colored hair and my unique light eyes covered with thick lenses, I was just a good satire. But she might like something I should do; and so I began to think seriously of writing something apart from my newspaper stories.

Dixon had suggested a play, but I knew I couldn't write a play. I might write a short story, though, or several of them. At least, I could try. I seemed to need to be doing something Dixon would approve even if it came to nothing. I could mention in my letter that I was writing a story; and so, that I might be truthful, I began one. It was about a singing teacher in Empire who called herself Madame Peggy. I began a story and called it *Madame Peggy*. Having started,—I wrote about a hundred words the first night,—I felt better. I was not quite so far from Dixon. We were both doing creative work.

This effort of mine was the more pathetic because my being in journalism had no basis in an original desire to write. I was in journalism accidentally. I had been taken into it in 1916 by the owner of the newspaper in Gallatin, Pennsylvania, who had run into me on a train one day and had said, "What are you going to do this summer, Jim?" I had told him I didn't know, and he had responded, "Come on over

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to Gallatin and work for me. I'll give you fifteen dollars a week."

Without knowing why, I said I would; and I did. I worked on the *Gallatin Repository* that summer and by fall had decided to continue as a newspaper man. I was encouraged in my decision about that time by a chance to go to Pittsburgh as a reporter on one of the papers there. What I want to make clear is that in those days our reporters weren't boys who intended to be something else as soon as they could.

Unquestionably, those were the last days of an era, though we didn't know it. We were in journalism just to do newspaper work and that was all. The reporters and desk men were definitely not literary; the book reviewer, the music critic, the dramatic editor, were; they were old men and were expected to be. But the news men had no thought of being anything but news men. This was, you see, before boys and a lot of girls began to infest the newspaper offices with the intention of working just long enough to break into the magazines.

I stayed on the Pittsburgh paper through the war, for reasons which, though valid, could not be explained. Those two years were a series of painful astonishments at the way the emergency was cleverly capitalized by so many who stayed at home. They left me confused and dissatisfied. So in the winter after the Armistice, I was ready for a change. Having no people and being free to live anywhere, I took the first opening offered, which happened to be on the *Empire Herald*. At twenty-four,

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until I met Dixon Latrobe, I was going along as an ordinary newspaper man without any thought of the future. Now, because I wanted to make Dixon think better of me, I began to wonder if I could write anything but news.

The Republican National Convention in Chicago was now the only subject in Empire. After our state convention—a formality following the primary—there was nothing for me to do temporarily; but in the choice of the delegates at large from Illyria I received additional insight into the practical politics of the state.

It was customary to have four delegates at large, whose real mission, I gathered, was to control the Illyria vote in the convention and act as a sort of executive committee in casting or trading it. The four usually included the two United States Senators, the Governor and the chairman of the Republican State Committee. But this year there had been some question of the Governor. This will require a little explanation.

In 1920 Illyria had in Theodore Bostwick a governor who might have been made to order for persons who believe in the possibility of government by the ablest. Wealthy enough to afford the office yet not wealthy enough to offend organized labor; educated by family, environment and university; broadened by extensive, leisurely travel; a student of government; a handsome and vigorous old man who looked as a governor should, he was thought by most Illyrians and all outsiders to be the best state executive in the Middle West.

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Bostwick had originated and put through some sane legislation, had conducted the state's affairs economically, had paid debts left by his predecessors, and had reduced the taxes. A successful manufacturer and a practical farmer, he might have been said to be the living answer to the demand then beginning to be heard for the business man in politics. His integrity and disinterest were beyond question. He had, in short, been such a good governor that the constitutional ban against two successive terms for once was regrettable.

Bostwick's term would expire in January, 1921, and, as the Republicans had nominated an admittedly ordinary politician for the place, Illyria obviously was to be the loser.

I was to learn, however, that two things were against Bostwick as a future factor in the well-being of Illyria. One was that he had been nominated in 1916 by one of those reform movements that spring up in every state periodically. This would not have been so bad, for party leaders usually can tolerate reform until they have time to neutralize it. His major, his determining, offense was that he had been wrong in 1912. He had followed Roosevelt.

I do not ask you to believe in the existence of this hatred for Roosevelt's admirers and satellites. I did not believe in it myself until I met it at close range. The stalwart of 1912 becoming the die-hard of 1920 was, I discovered, simply congenitally different from what was called, by courtesy, a progressive. The die-hard would not poison a progressive who happened to

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sit next at a Republican love feast, but the lethal instinct, I was forced to acknowledge, was present in Illyria; and no reiteration of the Bostwick record could eradicate it.

The party was in the hands of the die-hards. They had been compelled to accept four years of Bostwick, but they had not forgotten and did not intend to forget. This was why they did not relish making him one of the Big Four at the national convention. There was advantage and power in that honor that might be capitalized in the future; and they feared what Bostwick might do with it.

I received my primary lesson on the unpardonable sin from Seneca Giles just before the Illyria state convention. Giles must have been the second of the three old men of Atlantic City. He fitted the description.

At seventy-eight or nine, Giles was still a man of startling appetites. Empire was a city addicted to public dinners; it had a dozen men's societies devoted to eating and hearing speeches. Its citizens seemed to have a limitless capacity for punishment by bad food and worse oratory. At most of these dinners, Giles would appear, watching for a table with vacant places where he might consume the appetizer, soup and rolls of three or four absentees before the appearance of the principal course. To see him reach out and across with his rake-like arms and gather hotel food about him was a depressing experience. He had been married four times, so liberal were our divorce laws, and at present was in an interlude devoted to taking an im-

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pressionable frustrated school-teacher riding in the rich-looking coupé in which he went charging over the countryside. This detestable old man was armed with some unstated, peculiar political power.

He sat in his room in the law suite of Giles, Summerfield and Eckels, his cruel old eyes fastened on me as if I also had gone with Roosevelt.

"Bostwick? Yes, damn him, we got to make him a delegate to keep him in a good humor. We can't afford to make him mad. If we do he's liable to come out against McHenry for the Senate in 1922 and clean him for the nomination. Bostwick wants to be president; if he could get to the Senate he might make it. We don't want to get him and his friends stirred up; that's the reason and the only reason why he'll be one of the Big Four. But he won't be consulted in Chicago. He might as well take a good book along to the convention. He'll have plenty of time to read."

"Where I come from they think he's a big man."

"That's the trouble. Too damned big. He's so big we got to see he don't run for office in this state again. If he does we got to beat him."

"Beat a Republican?"

"Sure; if he ain't one of the right kind."

He clawed his short white beard and picked up a folder of legal papers.

"You're not quoting me in the paper. If it's for publication I'm just saying sweetly that the Big Four'll be Albree, McHenry, Bostwick and Simpson. But we don't want Bostwick. We've just got to give him any-

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thing he wants in reason to keep him from coming out for the Senate.”

That gives you the situation. I didn't care anything about Governor Bostwick. I supposed that, like most office-holders, he was probably a good deal of a bore. But knowing as I did that his public and private records were excellent and that he had a large personal following in the state, I had not been prepared for the savage outbreak of this leader of the party in our district. It was as much as to say that character and attainments, demanded so frequently in the newspaper editorial columns, counted for nothing if the possessor were not what the die-hards considered “right.” No genius could atone for having been wrong in 1912.

Having nothing to lose and feeling inclined to take advantage of being a reporter, I decided to test old Seneca on a subject closer to me.

“What about Dan Meredith? Is he going to run for anything? He's mentioned once in a while in our office.”

“You won't print anything?”

I reassured him.

“Well, I can't say for certain, but my guess is Dan'll be the next Secretary of Public Affairs in this state.”

“Not Congress?”

“Congress? Who the hell wants to go to Congress? Dan's going to be a big man. We don't want him wasting his time in the House, running errands for war veterans' families and writing letters to consuls and ministers for our plumbing supply manufacturers when

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they go abroad. This other job's a spring-board. Dan's one of our own boys . . . we've been getting him ready. He's got a future; got the right kind of wife, too,—rich and ignorant. Don't understand politics and don't like politicians, so she's never hanging around. Father-in-law's a big Methodist and stands high among the prohibitionists, so we can count on that. Dan's the type that'll pull from the Klan and the Catholics both because he knows how to avoid taking a stand when he makes a speech. That boy has a positive gift for generalities, especially when he's got a couple in him. He's moral enough for the mob, too; moral or clever,—it amounts to the same thing."

After this outburst from a Republican leader who, as was always said at political meetings, had shaken hands with Lincoln, I was more eager than ever to watch the business of nominating a presidential candidate in Chicago.



## CHAPTER VI

WELL located hotel rooms, Fordyce observed on the train to Chicago, were more desirable than front seats in the Coliseum. Newspapers might boast of their size, circulation and influence, but when it came to press-box places at a national convention they were graded honestly; the less their importance the farther from the platform. He explained that this accurate grading was a result of making a newspaper man dictator of the press-box. Editors might fool the people, but they never fooled each other.

"The *Herald* naturally belongs back under the side balcony," Fordyce explained; "although old Landers in his lifetime would never have admitted it. In Empire we'd let on our seats were at the right hand of Saint Arthur Brisbane and at the left of the *New York Times*. But here we know our place. A hotel room is what I wanted: not much can happen in the convention. The nomination will have to be ratified there, but it will be made somewhere else."

In spite of the calm with which grizzled, unemotional Fordyce regarded the impending drama, I could not help being excited. I had talked with and studied Harding. He and his friends gave off the air of the thing being fixed for him. I had interviewed Johnson when his train from Washington paused for a few

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minutes in Empire. The little Senator from California was reading a novel by Zane Grey, evidently not thinking about the convention, although he was going there with a hundred and twelve instructed delegates. He said his only object was to see that the platform killed the League of Nations.

Fordyce remarked that one trouble with this convention was that it had too many league killers. Lodge would kill it in his key-note speech; Jim Watson, of Indiana, was to be chairman of the resolutions committee and would take care of the anti-league plank in the platform.

After Woodrow Wilson had been thoroughly vilified the leaders probably would come together on somebody who didn't care much whether we joined the league or not.

"I think it will be a senator," Fordyce said. "This is strictly a senatorial convention. That's what makes it hard for Wood. He's got the most pledged delegates, but he wants something the senators intend to keep among themselves if they can. And he has no wash-room manager. Delegations are traded in many places where Wood won't be represented."

Fordyce had a room for us in the hotel that was to be Harding headquarters. On another floor were Dan Meredith and Benny Hightower. Senator Albree was near by. Corey Atchison, Seneca Giles and Judge Nathan Middleton were Empire notables I found registered there. Judge Middleton, I had decided, was the third of Laurel Fife's old men of the seaside. Giles,

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Middleton and the late Easter Landers,—they fitted the evidence I had slowly gathered.

"Just amuse yourself," Fordyce said. "There won't be anything to do for several days. Even after the convention opens it can't do anything till the platform is written, and that may take time."

"On account of the league," I put in.

"No. The league part probably is already written. Somebody like Elihu Root has fixed that up. The Irish question may hold them up. They'll have to frame a plank on that to catch as many Irish Catholic votes as possible without alienating the professional Protestants. It's a delicate matter, this thing of writing a plank about the Irish in an American party platform. That and dodging prohibition so the wets will be with us,—it will keep them busy for a few days."

If there was much to be learned about party nominees there was also something about party platforms.

I was glad to be free. Dixon Latrobe was in town. She had come on to join the art theater company and was living in a North-Side apartment where I was to appear at a time to be arranged. So my preliminary hours in the lobbies of the hotels into which the delegates were pouring were full of the pleasures of a spectator. My expenses were being paid for being there and doing nothing; and I was about to see Dixon. If Warren Harding knew that at an hour to be agreed upon he was going to be discovered to have the sacred Republican qualities of McKinley and nominated for

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the presidency in a year when election seemed certain, he was no more pleased with the world than I.

Everybody in the hotel rooms I visited seemed to have been afraid that everybody else would forget to bring liquor. If each man had appointed himself a committee of one on refreshments there could not have been any more bottles. Every bathroom held its exhibit of the lotions, dentifrices and medicines without which middle-aged and old men can not leave home, all in a state of disorder to which only the owners knew the key, and standing among these articles would be the quart of whisky. This was three or four years before the pocket flask. When callers came into the rooms they usually brought a quart or a pint; and if the host was to be flattered or was a particularly good or influential fellow the bottle would be left there. This process resulted by the end of twenty-four hours in some rooms being stocked with a dozen or more open quarts. There were bottles everywhere.

The men who held and frequented such rooms were the organization leaders, lieutenants and hangers-on from states and parts of states; they were not common delegates. Most of the latter—I was told there were to be nine hundred eighty-four—seemed to be standing awkwardly or sitting unhappily in the lobbies, their eyes darting about in hope of recognition, grinning and hurrying forward fawningly when some state celebrity like Jim Watson, Frank Willis or Wadsworth came out of an elevator. The delegates were there far ahead of their time and seemed to know it. The leaders would

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not be ready for three or four days to tell them what to do. You could see them staring into jewelry store windows along Wabash Avenue or State Street, hesitating in front of moving-picture shows, eating extra meals in the arm-chair places, morosely putting in time. There may have been consolation rooms of liquor for them, too; I didn't see any, and the delegates always looked sober and orderly, like a party of townspeople landed from an excursion boat on a Chamber of Commerce picnic.

The mezzanines and fringes of the lobbies and the corridors around state headquarters were full of women. It had begun to look as if enough states would ratify the suffrage amendment to permit all women to vote in the fall, so every headquarters was being nice to the ladies.

"Don't overlook that," Fordyce remarked, pointing to a hotel parlor marked Kansas headquarters into which forty or fifty women were crowding for some kind of conference. "This convention has got to nominate a good-looking man."

On the morning of the second day I received my summons from Dixon. She said in her note that if I could get away she would see me at her apartment that evening. I wondered if she really thought it would be difficult for me to get away. On the contrary, I had a hard time putting in the day. Sitting in the Coliseum watching Will Hays direct the making of history soon got to be a wearying bore. The only redeeming incident was the grim announcement by Cabot Lodge,

upon being designated permanent chairman, following his denunciation of Woodrow Wilson while temporary chairman, that he would not make a second key-note speech. I had not known that Lodge was a humorist.

There wasn't anything left for Lodge to say. He had already called Wilson a democratic free trader with socialistic proclivities and had declared that the defeat of the existing administration transcended every other question before the people.

Bryan, sitting below the speaker, held a perfect poker face all through the excoriation of Wilson. Fordyce happened to be in the other *Herald* seat just then and when I made some remark about it, he said:

"The Republican convention is the only thing that makes Bryan cynical. The poor old boy has faith in everything but this. He told David Lawrence a while ago that Governor Sproul, of Pennsylvania, would be the man because Penrose wanted him. I think he's away off, just as I think Lawrence is off in predicting Lowden; but Bryan is right in saying Penrose is in control of the convention. A sick man in Philadelphia controlling this nomination by telephone . . . there's something to think about."

David Lawrence was a political writer who syndicated his stories, which Fordyce had been playing up in the *Herald*. I mentioned that. "Oh," he said, "it doesn't matter if the syndicate writers are wrong. Using their stuff spares us the risk of making our own predictions in the paper and having to alibi. The syndicates have made newspaper editors almost superfluous;

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it's a wonder to me the owners don't discover it and save our salaries."

Dixon was four narrow, steep flights up in a remodeled residence that had no elevator. The brass latched clicked for me at her pressure up-stairs at exactly eight-fifteen. I had been ready since half past six, wondering how soon I might go without betraying my eagerness, for, although my mirror counseled against it, I had begun to think she might want to see me on my own account. This call, I felt, was going to be very cozy and confidential,—Dixon in an apple green dress, her dark hair low on her neck, her eyes lighting sympathetically as we talked, seated where we could look out over Lake Michigan.

I didn't see how a girl could be thought about as I had been thinking about her and not be thinking too. I had found myself dressing for her, wondering if I should take candy or flowers. It was myself at eighteen who went eagerly up those flights.

She was standing with her door open waiting for me, not in an apple-green dress but in a dark suit skirt and sweater. Her hair was not in a low sleek coil on her neck; it was what I have heard women describe as "screwed up." She looked like girls do when they say, "Don't look at me."

The room she drew me into was ordinary, the chief object in it being a battered trunk marked "Dixon Latrobe—Hotel." The windows did not overlook Lake Michigan but the rear of a storage warehouse.

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"I just beat you here," she said. "Didn't get away from rehearsal till half past seven. Take this chair. The woman who is backing the company is a nice person and awfully rich, but the show business has changed since she was a girl. Well,—how have you been?"

I offered her my cigarettes and busied myself with carrying her a light. Aside from her looks and the fact that she had told me she had to rush home to keep the appointment—which she had made herself—I did not like that "How have you been?" I didn't care for people who asked that.

"Quite well," I said, "and awfully anxious to see you again."

"I wish a hundred thousand theater-goers were like that."

"No; seriously," I blundered along, "I have thought almost of nothing else." It seemed to me she would admit presently the personal basis of this visit. Just what that basis was I could not have stated, I saw afterward; but as I sat there then it appeared tangible.

"That's sweet of you," she replied absently. Then, in a businesslike tone, she went on. "Now what I wanted to see you about is this,—Meredith is in town, of course, at this convention?"

What she wanted to see me about was Meredith and Laurel; she did not want to see me about myself, for myself. No wonder she hadn't changed her clothes; this was a business interview and she was dressed for business.



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"He's at my hotel." I intended to say it coldly.

"Well, Laurel is coming on; and she is determined to see him, talk to him, just once. She is convinced that she must. I'm doubtful, but she insists. Granting she won't change her mind, can you manage it?"

I didn't answer at once for I was picking myself up. This meeting simply did not mean a thing to Dixon, so I had to get used to the new idea. Another reason for hesitating was resentment of her unremitting activity in the interest of Laurel to the exclusion of every other thought. She was never too driven to attend to Laurel's business. "I suppose"—I remember thinking—"she will treat me just as well as I need to be treated to get the service out of me. I happen to be close to Dan Meredith; that is why I am here." So it was difficult for me to cover my feelings when I replied.

"I might. I can't depend on him, but I'm willing to try. You know they're nominating a president, and Dan's close to the man who's going to get it."

I couldn't resist reminding her that we weren't to be ordered around.

She sat and looked at me gravely after that speech, then rose without a word and went into the other room. I got up and strolled to the window to stare out at the outline of the storage warehouse. I didn't know she had come back till I felt a hand on my arm and was turned around to look down into her face. She was smiling adorably, in a soft little gown that was not apple-green but something else infinitely becoming. She had done some radical things to her hair.

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"Don't be mad at me, Jim," she said, astonishing me.

She led me across to my chair, disappeared again and returned with a tray, some glasses, ice and the ingredients of a sensible concoction which she mixed as she talked. I suppose I just sat there blinking behind my lenses; I remember my long hands were knotting and unknotting between my knees as they do when I am agitated.

"I see what happened," she said. "I forgot again that I'm a girl. I've been making my own living since I was seventeen—that's seven years—and I suppose I've taken on the masculine way."

I defended my anger wretchedly, without art, by saying something like:

"I'm devoted to Laurel's affairs, too; but I'm more interested in yours . . . in you."

Something like that, very solemn and earnest and awkward. And she said:

"I see, Jim. You have temperament: I've got to be careful of you. You're sensitive. I knew that when I first saw you in Empire, and I should have remembered it. But when I discovered you had come to see me, Jim, didn't I go and change my dress?"

I think we sat for some time without saying anything more. I was very happy. I had got across to her that I was not there exclusively in Dan Meredith's behalf; and now that I had made my point I felt large and generous.

"Dan knows that the Atlantic City girl was Laurel," I told her presently. "It looks as if I'm going to be to

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him what you are to Laurel. If he wants to see her where do you think it had better be,—here?"

"Yes; you and I shall be here too. We can go into the kitchenette and pretend to be making coffee or something like that at the right time. My mind isn't made up; but she feels that if she can see him, talk to him, she'll be satisfied. I don't know what she means, exactly. I only know she loves him and wants him to know it; but she doesn't want to take him away from his wife. It's all very modern and mixed up."

"She's loving a Meredith of her own imagination; he doesn't exist."

"No; that isn't quite it. She fears that he doesn't exist, but she thinks she can rebuild him out of the remnants of the boy she knew in 1912. Laurel has intuition. She sees what he's become and hopes to save him from it. This will be about Friday or Saturday; I'll have to call you at your hotel. . . . What about this story you are writing, the one you mentioned in your letter?"

I remember I assented warmly at first to Laurel's desire for an interview with Meredith. The loyalty and encouragement of such a nature as hers, cleansing his consciousness of the uneasiness growing out of the ancient wrong he had done her, might easily prove the medicine he needed. If Laurel knew intuitively, as Dixon suggested, that Dan's weaknesses were hurrying his destruction by his environment, her influence might save him.

There was one danger of which Laurel evidently had

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not thought. I debated whether I should speak of it to Dixon, but it was so hard to state that I gave it up. The danger I had in mind was the possibility of Meredith misinterpreting Laurel Fife's efforts to renew their contact. Not many men could withstand the flattery of such an approach; and I did not suppose Meredith was one of the noble few. Laurel Fife might find him unable to comprehend what she was trying to do for him. In meeting him she stood to lose whatever faith she was now fostering. If she was thinking about a kind of love—spiritual, disinterested, self-sacrificing—that probably was beyond Meredith's experience and belief.

But Laurel would have to find this out for herself. The discovery might free her from the tyranny of her own imaginings. I decided to let it go; I would help bring them together and Laurel would have to take her chances.

Before I could tell Dixon about *Madame Peggy* we were interrupted by a ring from below and, after a "Yes?" and a reply in the tube, she told somebody to come on up.

"It's our director," she explained. "He and I are about the only ones in this troupe who have had any real experience. He wants to talk about what we're doing over at the theater. You needn't go. He's somebody in New York; it won't hurt you to know him if you ever write a play."

But I went, after meeting Colin Hay. He was an athletic-looking fellow of about forty who almost filled

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the little room and whose voice was so large and deep that I was sure mine wasn't being heard. He was obviously a dominating person, and when I found myself in the street after having hurriedly confirmed with Dixon my willingness to try to bring Dan to the apartment, I had a feeling of having been swept out by the compelling Mr. Hay with Dixon standing by helpless. But after her pretty and beseeching gesture when she had reappeared after changing her dress, I couldn't be angry at the untimely interruption even though I believed it unnecessary and due to Colin Hay's desire to be with Dixon rather than to any need of his to discuss the play they were about to produce.

The next day the convention was permitted to take a ballot,—a trial vote. On it Wood led, getting two hundred eight-seven and a half. Lowden was second with more than two hundred. Johnson got a hundred thirty-three. Our candidate—I had begun to think that way about Harding—had only sixty-five and a half.

"Just right," Seneca Giles commented in his senile cackle as I met him leaving Meredith's room. "A favorite on the first ballot,—that's about all a man can hope for when he depends on this direct primary. You notice it's one of Roosevelt's bright young men who's ahead as a result of these state primaries. Good way for 'em to learn that Saint Theodore's policies won't work. Wood has shot his bolt now. Going in? Albree's in there with Dan."

The senior Senator from Illyria was moving forward

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and backward in a rocking chair from which his feet barely touched the floor. He was in his shirt-sleeves, but he wore the black soft hat without which he was seldom seen. I had been introduced to him twice on his visits to Empire, but I had never had a chance to study him. On account of his power in the Senate and in Illyria, I was eager to meet him behind the scenes.

I had already discovered that while Thomas Albree had the oiliness of the professional man of the people he had another side—a serious and perhaps even sincere one. This side revealed his mind as a file of railroad, taxation and foreign affairs information, presenting one of those frequent and painful paradoxes of politics, making one wonder how a man so well equipped could bring himself to carry on a never-ending campaign of servile flattery among the yokels of his constituency. He had just been renominated, so his return to the Senate for six years was assured; but to observe his manner with the common Illyrians around the hotel was to be convinced that he lived in dread of losing the good will of the people.

His greeting to me was an illustration. "Come in, Jim," he called; "I'm just telling your fellow citizen that he's got to get ready to answer the voice of the people. I want to see this young man governor. I wouldn't mind escorting him to the bar of the Senate as my colleague. What do you fellows over in Empire think of him?"

This was one of Albree's ways,—always deferring to another, trying to make the other think he was con-

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sulting him and expecting to be guided by his advice. It was a part of his method.

Dan was stretched on the bed, from which he waved me in and pointed to the dresser that was serving as a buffet. I shook my head and sat down on the luggage stand. I had seen too much liquor in the short time I had been in Chicago. Albree, I knew, did not drink in public. The largest body of voters in our state was the registered membership of the Anti-Saloon League. The league's approval in a Republican primary meant nomination, and nomination meant election. Little Senator Albree liked a good Monongahela whisky, but he did not intend to have it reported to the league that he had been seen taking one. He was not afraid to ridicule that other league, Woodrow Wilson's, but he was afraid of the man who was now dictator of this prohibition league.

Dan evidently had not been troubled that day by any such reservations. He was not drunk but he had been drinking regularly. To-day he looked much older than a man should in his early thirties. The light through the hotel windows fell against his blackish hair and showed me fine lines of gray I had not seen before. His liberally cut mouth was twisted downward at the corners, around which was an unbecoming bristle that suggested indifference to the daily razor. The brown shoes against the footboard needed the bootblack. The hand that dropped over the side of the bed was not as clean as it should have been. Between its first and second fingers was a cigarette that had gone out.

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Senator Albree, forgetting with my banal formal reply that he had addressed me, dozed a little, and then got to his feet. He pulled his waistcoat on and went out, his coat under his arm. I didn't care; neither did Dan. Senator Albree was a fact. He might go away, but he would be back. You didn't have to be alert mentally with him as you did with Governor Bostwick.

"Bostwick is an intellectual strain on the people," Fordyce had said to me. "What they really want are suspenders and a belt and a palm-leaf fan at a county fair, with a funny story, not too nice, that they can take back home. 'Senator Albree was telling me a good one at the fair last week' . . . like that."

As soon as Albree had gone I got up and bolted the door.

"Dan," I said, "do you want to see Laurel Fife?"

He rolled so that he could see me as I stood at the foot of the bed.

"Because if you do, I think it can be arranged. She is going to be in Chicago this week with a friend of mine."

He was sitting on the edge of the bed now.

"Let me get this right," he said. "Does she want to see me,—you know what I mean; is she in on this?"

I nodded. He sat with his head drooping, a hand reaching out for the footboard as if for support.

"I don't know whether to go or not; I want to, but what's the use? Look what I did to her . . . walking off and leaving her railroad fare back to New York just because three old hellions from home scared me."



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"I don't think Laurel intends to reproach you with that."

"No; but that doesn't let me out, with her or with myself. What happened? They said to me, 'Who is this girl you're with? Bet you don't even know her real name. Watch yourself, boy; you're a long way from home. Better get out of here and go back to Empire. People back there have plans for you; you've got a future.'

"And what did I do? I let them scare me, the damned old busybodies, down there on a spree,—all three drunk as hell that same night, and old Easter Landers, the moral newspaper owner and keeper of the Empire conscience, thrown out of a flat by a woman and losing his watch and all his money,—telling me what to do. I suppose Laurel told you what I did in New York to help her out? I was right and didn't know it. I'd better have gone with her then and there. And what do you think? While I was talking to them at their table in the café one of them was winking his fishy old eye at her and trying to get her to come over and sit down. Well, you know what happened. I took their advice and you see the result."

Unaccountably, I suddenly felt older, more competent.

"Dan," I said sharply, "you know yourself you can be governor or senator if you want to. I imagine all Laurel wants is to try to make you live up to your chances. In the long run, somebody has got to take a higher view of these offices. The country's had better

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things in the past. Seeing Laurel, you might get a different idea of yourself."

"I'm better off not seeing her. Suppose she gets to me in a way that makes me crazy and I raise hell with all my connections, perhaps leave Alice. . . ."

"Oh, well, Dan, if you're just a plain coward,—thinking of Laurel Fife as a temptation; that's noble of you, isn't it? Don't misunderstand; I don't care whether you go to see her or not. I'm just trying to find out whether you want to."

He had risen and was pouring himself a drink at the bureau. "I'm sorry you called me a coward, Jim. I'm sorry you think that of me, just as we're getting to be friends. I'll come. You make the engagement."

"Don't start pitying yourself; that's your liquor working. Better lay off of it to-day and to-morrow. I'll let you know when we're going."

I left him standing there, his collarless shirt open at the neckband, his hair falling over his face. He was staring at himself in the mirror, liquor glass in hand, rubbing his unshaved chin.

While I was studying the case in my own room I recalled that nobody, practically, was saying anything about the presidential nomination. Some of our men—Meredith, Albree, Seneca Giles, Hightower—were spending more time in the hotels than in the Coliseum and were talking very little. When Fordyce came in, I commented on this.

"The trading is on," he said. "They're making deals."

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Johnson can be vice-president if he'll go on the ticket with Knox. I'd take it if I were he for Knox probably won't live the term out. But Johnson is one of these western idealists. Wood and Lowden are both out. There is a belief that Johnson has the veto, though he can't have the prize. They'll get together on somebody, Harding maybe, about Friday night or Saturday. The Lowden and Johnson people want an adjournment till Monday without a choice, but they won't get it. This convention is really nothing but a senatorial caucus."

Friday morning the floor clerk handed me an envelope from Dixon. I was to bring Dan that evening. He was standing in his room when I gave him the news; and, as the place was full of gabbling politicians, I simply gave him the sheet of note-paper and waited while he read it.

"Come for me here at eight o'clock," he said, and went on with what he had been telling Corey Atchison. "Harding spent the least, almost nothing, in the primaries; but he'll need plenty for the campaign from people close to him. Lots of regular givers will be scared off by this fund investigation and lots of others will use it as an excuse to hold out."

Corey, I suspected, was trying to find out how little his father, one of the state's rich men, would be let off with by the state and national committees. The old gentleman had founded his fortune by the grace of a number of Republican tariffs, but he liked to imagine his success was due to his own genius and that he owed the party nothing. The party had assured him of cheap

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raw material, cheap labor and low freight rates while protecting him from competition from European manufacturers; so it naturally expected him to be grateful.

"This convention is all ready to crack," Benny Hightower said to me. "It will all be over by to-morrow night unless something happens. It may be Harding and Allen, of Kansas. I hear the break will come from Kansas if they make Allen vice-president. The real old guard has taken charge of this convention. You'll see Sproul going to the Pennsylvania delegates on the floor and releasing them to vote for whoever Penrose wants."

I could believe this. Thursday evening had seen Lowden, Johnson and Wood eliminated from the headlines as real possibilities. The talk was now of Knox and Sproul. The determining power of the sick Senator in Philadelphia was tacitly admitted.

When I went for Dan at ten minutes to eight I felt I was in a hotel feverish with conferences, large and small. Something was in the air. I was not hoping to find him free; I expected to have to wait perhaps an hour. But I was alarmed when I found his door locked. The key was at the floor clerk's desk. Obviously he had been caught in a group intent on a detail of the general scheme and had not been able to escape. So I walked the corridor unhappily, counting the minutes till half past eight. Then I hurried to the telephone to try to call the rooms where he might be.

The telephone lines were crazily, hysterically busy. Every room seemed to be talking. I couldn't get any-

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body. Calling two bellboys, I sent one of them among the upper corridors to knock on doors and inquire for Dan; the other I had page him through the lower part of the house. It was no use. He couldn't be found.

From Corey Atchison, wandering vaguely in the lobby, I learned that Dan had got into a taxicab with Seneca Giles and Benedict Hightower about six o'clock, Benny, Corey added, was drunk. So at nine o'clock I called Dixon.

"I can't find him," I said. "Evidently there is some meeting on, something about a candidate. I've heard they're trying to fix it for Harding in Johnson's room to-night. Dan may be there and can't get away."

"Laurel is waiting," Dixon told me. "Dan probably will turn up. It's early yet. We'll wait till ten o'clock, anyhow."

But at ten, and half past ten, and eleven he was still missing. Fordyce helped me a little. He said Dan wasn't in any of the big discussions. At eleven-thirty I called Dixon again.

"Laurel says never mind and for you to go to bed and forget it," she replied. "She will be here till Sunday morning,—if Dan wants to come."

On Sunday morning, when the newspapers were telling of the completion of the ticket by the hurried nomination of Governor Coolidge, of Massachusetts, for the vice-presidency, after Harding had been named for president on the tenth ballot, I found Meredith.

He was a pathetic figure as he lay asleep in an apartment far out on the South Side. In another bedroom

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were the aged Giles and the reckless, hard-drinking Hightower, sodden. The woman who admitted Fordyce and me—we had traced the trio through the taxicab company—said the gentlemen had been there since Friday evening. Old Mr. Giles was a friend of hers; he often came out from Empire, she said. They had come for a little relaxation from the hard work of the convention and the young gentleman, and then the others, had drunk too much.

While Fordyce was rousing Hightower and Giles, I stood and looked at Empire's original Harding man. Suddenly I felt deeply sorry for him, and my impulse was to call Fordyce to look down at him with me, feeling that he would share my sensations. Momentarily I forgot Dixon and Laurel, forgot the purposes of the now dispersed convention. I could only think of this living gesture of futility.

Fordyce stood beside me a minute and then turned to the door where the taxicab drivers stood who were to help us down-stairs and back to the hotel with these fallen pillars of the Republican party.

"Handle him gently, boys," Fordyce said. "His country needs him."

## CHAPTER VII

FORDYCE, of whom, in spite of our close association, I knew little except that he was my friend, left the *Empire Herald* late in 1921 and went to Hamilton, the state capital, there to try to galvanize the corpse of the *Hamilton Express*; and early in 1922 he wrote to me saying he would like to have me with him. So I gave my two weeks' notice to the *Herald* and packed my steamer trunk for my next episode in journalism.

Through the summer and fall of the Harding election year I had seen Meredith no more than any other Empire lawyer. Even when the Republicans of the Congressional District, forced into temporary harmony by Seneca Giles, went to the state convention of 1921 and demanded and obtained Meredith's nomination for Secretary of Public Affairs, which resulted in his election in November of that year, I was not in contact with him. The state position to which he was elected was one of those exempt from the operations of the primary; the convention had power to nominate for this as well as for a few other key offices, control of which was essential to the continuing authority of men behind the scenes like Giles.

Only once did Dan allude to the Chicago incident. In January after his election, just before he went to

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Hamilton to take the oath and begin to function in the state administration, he sent for me and asked me to drive out with him to look at a piece of property he had bought.

We went in his wife's sedan, moving rapidly and in easy comfort as Dan drove over the ice-coated roads that cut the bluish white countryside into geometric designs. The direct east-and-west, north-and-south, of the surveyors who laid out this part of the Middle West were never so impressive to me as on this winter drive of a hundred miles.

We came just after noon to an unpaved side-road that was as meandering as the state roads had been straight, and we followed this for three or four miles to a lane that went through a woods of oaks warmly brown in their dry leaves. The lane ended on the high bank of a solitary lake, white with the snow that lay unbroken on the ice. Here, in a meadow that was a crescent in the clearing around the lake, on a knoll that was almost a hill for that region, stood a farmhouse with its related wooden buildings.

The builder had departed radically from the current depressing style of farmhouses and had, by using timbers of pioneer dimensions, probably sawed in the woods with a portable mill, achieved a dwelling fitted to its setting of forest and waters. There were a central part of two-story height and two wings of a story each. The wide siding had simply been covered with a protective coat that had stained the planks only a little and had been left for adoption by the color scheme of



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nature. You stepped out on a brick and stone floored terrace, an urban touch, and walked into the entrance that faced the lane. This was a welcoming, satisfactory side of the house; but the better was that straight through to a veranda that looked across the lake to the black rim of the untouched forest.

The middle part of the house was one great room that went clear to the peaked roof, and around it was a narrow balcony of planks with a hickory rail from which opened some bedrooms that depended on the dormers for their space and light. A stone chimney with a veritable maw for log-fires occupied one end of this unexpectedly inviting room. Dan busied himself making a blaze of slabs cut and stacked for use.

"I could have had this place practically for the taxes," he remarked, standing now with his back to the flames that were licking the sweet-smelling native wood. He was a comfortable, competent-looking figure in a rich brown suit that belonged with his coloring.

"I gave the fellow a fair price," he went on. "He was a broken-down Chicago newspaper man who once had a dream of combining farming and writing. He couldn't make the grade, and the thing got into the courts. He had built such a good house and had such good land—eighty-five acres of it—that I gave him something more than his equity and assumed the mortgages. He put in a water system and you can generate electricity in one of the sheds. There is no stock and the place hasn't been planted right; but I'll take care of that. I'd rather begin at the beginning."

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"How does Mrs. Meredith like it? It will make a wonderful summer place."

It was a trite statement, but I was trying to get at the relation of this purchase to Meredith's family. I couldn't picture Alice Meredith out here in the wilds in the summer, not to speak of the winter.

"Summer place? She don't even know I own it. This is no vacation cottage. It's a real farm. I'm going to get a tenant in here to live on it and work it. I'll come out and stay whenever I can. You'll never catch any of the Overtons here."

That was what I had thought. It wouldn't suit them, anyhow. The living-room was partly furnished with things left by the Chicago failure. A reproduction of a tavern table and some good factory Windsors and slat backs gave the place a mellow old-time appearance. Dan had thrown his fur coat, gloves and hat on the table and was now unlocking a motor picnic case.

"I've got a good friend at home," he said. "That's the cook. There's a bottle of liquor in my inside pocket there."

It was a luncheon such as one would not believe could be carried in a box, for there were hot dishes, including soup, and some roast ham that might have just come from the oven. This kit of Meredith's disclosed everything needed for serving a meal, and Dan showed pleasure in arranging it on one end of the table, the one toward the logs. Here we sat in a moment, ready to begin, Dan pouring a liberal appetizer from the bottle. These men in politics seemed to prefer straight

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whisky to the various prohibition concoctions beginning to be carried in pockets; and for them there seemed to be an unlimited supply. Although national prohibition had been in effect two years and Illyria had been legally dry for four or five the men in office we newspaper people met and those who made the officials seldom alluded to prohibition except in their dry speeches.

Dan continued the thought of his wife in a moment:

"It would be fine if Alice could put up with anything like this, even once in a while, but she can't; and she couldn't imagine trying. My taking this place would seem so outlandish to her and her people that it makes things easier to keep it quiet. But if I could live on a little farm like this and had a family,—you know, wife who liked it too, and kids,—I'd be contented. From now on I'll probably be in office most of the time and I'm going to use this place to slip away to when I get tired. I wish I was a real farmer."

I would have liked to argue a point there, that of the right of the wife to ignore her husband's desire for a mode of life, and the resort of the husband to secrecy in order to gratify a craving in a makeshift way. It was a reversal of what was natural and right; what had, in a measure, helped make the country. But Dan was going on:

"Jim, that wasn't any accident, that time in Chicago when I was going to meet Laurel with you and didn't show up."

"I didn't suppose it was."

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"No; it was no accident. It was deliberate; that is, I knew when I started out that evening with those two I wouldn't get back. I couldn't get over the idea of the mess I'd made of everything."

There was nothing to say to that.

"But I'm over it now. Alice and I get on each other's nerves; have for several years. We'd be better off not married. But I'm started now; I'm going to be a public man from now on. I don't want any outward separation or a divorce. . . ."

"Dan," I put in, "are you sure you're not kidding yourself? I'm not recommending anything, but where's your history? Plenty of public men have had this sort of trouble; they've taken things into their own hands and still have gone to the top. Even the seventh commandment,—that hasn't always been a bar to the White House or the Senate."

He was making me mad, for he sounded as if he really believed he couldn't amount to anything in politics if he straightened out his private life. I added:

"I'd like to ask you this: Wouldn't you be a damned sight more likely to be a success in every way if you were happy in your private life?"

"I am going to be happy in my private life; don't worry about that. I'm going to put all that out of my mind and get my happiness in other ways."

"You mean you're going to put love out?"

"Sure. I'm going to be a United States senator one of these days. I'd be a fool, wouldn't I, to go to work and upset everything now just for . . ."

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"Just for love; that's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Why, yes; I guess so."

I thought: "And you're the fellow who had the courage to take a crack at a strange man in an elevator for the sake of a girl you didn't know, with all the evidence against her; you had that much courage once."

I got up and walked around the room while Dan sat and ate placidly. We could not agree; we were fundamentally different. He coolly thought he could close certain doors of his consciousness and go on with his program. I felt that a man could go on only if he had opened all such doors and faced whatever might be within. It was the difference between our ages: in the ten years people had begun to learn the advantage of applying the methods of radical surgery and antisepsis to their diseases of consciousness.

It was impossible to go on talking about it. He either did not know what love was or he refused to confess it. I was positive the emotion Laurel had for him was different from anything he had felt, at least since his maturity. It was as I had told Dixon Latrobe: Laurel Fife was loving a man who didn't exist. If she should be thrown with Dan now she would be desperately shocked by her disillusionment, especially if she would discover the low theories he held, with his intimates, of filling important office.

I went back to the table.

"Let's not discuss this any more, Dan. Let's be political friends, or whatever we can be, but let's cross this subject off."

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"All right. You think a man can't rule these things,—can't put them out of his life."

I broke out again, for I was very unhappy. His view violated everything I believed. "I know damned well you can't. . . ."

"Shall we go and look around the place?" he asked abruptly.

And that was the last reference Dan made to his relationship with Alice and Laurel for that time.

I suppose that if I had not been wholly and, obviously, hopelessly in love with Dixon Latrobe I would not have responded so heatedly to Meredith's cynical attitude.

One more question I asked him that day. We were standing on the bluff above the lake. The early winter twilight was creeping up around us, making me think of what wholesome solitude, what bracing rigors, lay close to us as we huddled around imagined superior substitutes in bragging cities,—things waiting to medicine to minds and characters but seldom used except in the measured dosage of the conventional vacation.

"Dan," I asked, "why don't you resign your office and get clear out of politics? A law practise and a farm . . . you might arrive at what you want in the end."

Apparently he was oblivious to me as he watched the dissolving landscape, for he said absently, "I wish I could stay out here all night."

I thought he hadn't heard my question, but he had.

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He faced me, taking a step toward the automobile indicating the country holiday was over.

"Quit? I couldn't quit. It looks like I'd been chosen for something big. Can a fellow throw away a chance to go into history? Look at Harding. Being in the White House must make the old boy believe in predestination. He must know it's not due to anything he's got. Well, it makes a fellow superstitious. I'd be going against the plan as it's working out if I dropped out. A man can't interfere with things."

So that was it. Dan had what I had noticed in more than one politician, an impression that he was ordained. All the low boggy places in his life would not matter if in the end he reached the hard upper ground. If he had any philosophy, I concluded, that must be it.

He was serious about going to the Senate; and now that I understood how such things were managed, I found myself looking at them without emotion. In Illyria the men in politics no longer troubled to impress the voters with the goodness, honesty and ability of candidates. They could leave the verdict of the people to the intensive organization in the districts and counties. If a man wanted to go up his objective was the good will of the small group that controlled the organization.

Meredith belonged. At the right time word had gone out that he was to be Secretary of Public Affairs; at the right time, the rulers would speak further. Until then he had nothing to do but give an acceptable appearance of being an active and able member of the state admin-

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istration. Spencer, the Governor who had succeeded Bostwick, also belonged. Again the organization was in full power. It owned the government of Illyria; Illyria's business and the profits accruing in advantage and other things of value were the property of the men at the head of the party.

You can see there was nothing in this process to make patriots of beneficiaries; but there was everything to make them feel that if they were satisfactorily regular and not too conscientious they could go higher. A few years earlier I would have said a man with Meredith's weakness of character would be disqualified for high places. Now I saw that in certain contingencies a weak character would go farther than a strong one. The thing that was not wanted, the thing that would disqualify, was originality. Meredith's calm references to the Senate were credible; he was promising material; all he needed was a few more years of seasoning.

(In the recent campaign you probably noticed the newspaper photographs of this farm of Meredith's. The buildings and surroundings were substantially the same as when I knew them, but the stock and the evidences of agriculture were of a recent date and, according to my knowledge of the facts, must have belonged to a tenant occupying the premises much later. In fact, this visit and two or three subsequent ones, one of which I will describe in due course, were all the owner made to the place. Not that I believe the interest Meredith professed in farming was assumed, but the



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young New York newspaper man recently in charge of the Republican press bureau naturally took certain necessary liberties with the scene in preparing the matter sent out to the newspapers.

(I must say for Meredith that when the young farmer to whom our friend gave that present of money the morning after the all-night drinking party in Empire identified the donor and sent the incident in to the press bureau, Meredith rejected it as distasteful to him as publicity. There was something personal to him about that, something connected with his lost youth, that compelled him to veto it.)

## CHAPTER VIII

**A** WHILE ago I thought I heard somebody say, "But what about Meredith's religion? You are leaving that out. You've got to give us the rounded figure."

It is easy enough to dispose of that. I know what you are thinking about. You are saying that Meredith would have, necessarily, a moral and ethical side that would make him noble at the proper time. But I say, not necessarily. You don't care for the unpleasant suggestion that a man so constituted could go so high, so you throw out a challenge by asking about his religion.

At the time I knew him best he had none. A year or so ago, during his campaign for the presidency, I came across the statement that he was a life-long Methodist, a man of deep Christian character. This was in a campaign handbook where the phrase "deep Christian character" was thought by the person who wrote it to be indispensable. The facts were something like this:

Meredith's mother, who died when he was about eighteen, joined the First Methodist Church of Empire when the family moved from the farm to the city. Dan probably went to the services occasionally as a high-school boy. While he was at the University of Michigan, where he took his law, he went to no church.

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When Dan married Alice Overton he "united" one Sunday morning to please her family; and went rather regularly until he got his practise established. He subscribed fifty dollars a year to the budget. You will recall that one thing said of him was that he always kept up his weekly contribution to the old church at home where he had received his lasting impressions.

The truth was that Meredith was never impressed. When I knew him intimately, as Secretary of Public Affairs of Illyria, I came to the conclusion that, like so many other successful men, he simply never thought of what religious people call spiritual things. The evangelical denominations he probably thought of as social organizations which he did not need,—except to have their political good will,—or as philanthropic agencies which he regarded as the private enterprises of those who carried them on.

He not only knew nothing of Catholicism: he avoided contacts with it consistently because the Republican party of Illyria at that time was strategically Protestant. His rise was identical with that of the Ku Klux Klan. For two or three years that secret society had swelled Republican majorities; and while he took care never to be known as a Klan favorite,—for he desired the Catholic vote also,—he was aware of the political perils of inviting the displeasure of the professional Protestants by any recognizable Catholic connections.

So he was cut off from both influences that might have altered him. He had never been made conscious of his responsibility to himself. And, as he was unin-

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fluenced by religion, he was uninfluenced by books. Such required reading as he had done in school and college in order to graduate had evidently never touched him; and after he was in public life he never read anything but the newspapers. At one time he was converted by the advertising of the *Literary Digest* and began to depend on that for the general information he feared he might need unexpectedly.

Approaching the middle thirties his chief pleasure was the political conference, with its accompanying drinking.

A full-length portrait of this man who has been so much talked about as a candidate requires at this point some brush work on his relations with women. One criticism of his story will be that it lacks what the readers and critics began a few years ago to call sex. They will say, "What about this man and sex?"

In spite of the recent freedom of discussion about sex, the fact remains that nobody—doctors of psychiatry and psychologists excepted—knows accurately anybody's sex life but his own. Ignoring what should be easily recognizable, people have been willing to imagine that many others lead an untrammelled sex life. This, of course, is a delusion. The rather common condition is an unhappy chastity like Meredith's. He was kept in bonds by fear. He had no moral or religious scruples, but he was afraid of finding himself in somebody's power. I wondered sometimes if that had anything to do with the over-emphasis of his kind on drinking. Drinking was a comparatively safe pleasure even

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in a state as dry as Illyria, if one were advanced sufficiently in politics. Adventures with women implied the risk of placing oneself at the pleasure of an inscrutable and uncertain other person.

While Dan Meredith and his wife were drifting farther apart, as he moved from Empire to the state capital, I have always felt positive that, at least until he went to Hamilton, he had not invited the more or less willing solace of more beautiful and less preoccupied ladies than Alice.

Business life, offering comparative security and tenure, with a fair amount of privacy, is more likely than politics to throw off an occasional satyr. But one rising in politics must neglect his money-making occupation and seldom comes into the possession of the privilege given by opulence. If it be a virtue for pagans to be chaste through fear of consequences some figures seen against the political landscape must be counted paragons.

The new Secretary of Public Affairs and his wife had opened their official residence in an apartment hotel near the center of Hamilton. As I went to pay my duty call I could not help wondering how heavily the Overton department store, two hundred miles away, was subsidizing the state officer of the family. The position to which Meredith had been elected carried a salary of only four thousand dollars a year. Its holder could not retain his law practise. Somebody had to pay the difference between the four thousand and what the Secretary and his family were compelled to spend in

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living, entertaining and party campaign contributions. Such posts demanded rich men, but, as it was against the leaders' theories of successful politics to nominate rich men, poor but ambitious ones with not too conspicuous backing were preferred among favorites. It should be remembered that what may be advanced in praise of man in one state of life may with equal force be used to condemn one in a different state.

For perhaps six thousand dollars a year added to their daughter's private income, Mr. and Mrs. Overton would meet the Governor and his lady occasionally, and might be placed on the reception committee if the President and Mrs. Harding should visit the state. I knew the Overtons would feel compensated by being able to speak knowingly at Empire dinner-parties of the celebrities they had met.

Life in the state capital was a mixture of the official formality that was a feeble imitation of Washington, and the informality of the comfortable Great Valley town that Hamilton was. The population in the second year of normalcy was two hundred fifty thousand,—fifty-two thousand fifty-six, the Chamber of Commerce circular entitled *Hamilton Has It* stated.

The city was beginning to feel metropolitan. It was too big at last for its business men to go home for the noon meal. An Athletic Club where they could gossip for two hours among the ash-trays had borne witness to the municipal coming of age. Its stenographers had begun to board at the food and drink counters of the drugstore soda fountains; the newspapers had begun to discuss the parking and traffic problem. They pre-

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tended, of course, that they desired the problem solved, which was only partially true because congested streets are the mark of growth, and growth is the objective most approved by the press.

In spite of this, customs of the McKinley era lingered. For example, men and their wives paid evening calls. So when I found former Governor Bostwick and his wife with Dan and Alice in the living-room of their suite I was not surprised.

When Dan saw me he got up with pleased alacrity from the little gilt settee on which he had been talking to Mrs. Bostwick. He crossed the room in strides, shaking my hand and clapping me on the back.

"Governor," he said, "I want you to meet a boy from our part of the state. Jim, shake hands with ex-Governor Bostwick. You've heard of him!"

I didn't know what to do; but it didn't matter, for the room was so small I could not have swerved to pay my respects to Mrs. Meredith before being rushed in front of Bostwick. I had to make the best of our host's manners.

I thought at first Meredith was a little giddy at being found entertaining the celebrated Bostwick, whose able governorship had made him a national figure.

Bostwick gripped my hand and the corners of his pleasant mouth twitched, giving me to understand that he appreciated my embarrassment. He turned me around to where Alice Meredith was standing. She shook hands with me and presented me to Mrs. Bostwick.

"Jim's one of the new men on the *Express*," my ener-

getic host went on, speaking more emphatically than was necessary and waving an unlighted cigar from which he had not removed the red and gold band. I had seen him do this in Empire without thinking about it, but here, on account of the composed, good-looking, gray-haired woman who was Mrs. Bostwick, his gestures seemed crude. "The *Express* brought two men from Empire recently; they know where to get good ones," Meredith added.

Mrs. Bostwick indicated that I might sit beside her.

"Theodore and I always go to see the young people in office," she said in a low-pitched voice that was as enjoyable to hear as her animated blue eyes were to watch. "We have not forgotten how it was when he first came to Hamilton as a country state representative. That was in 1889; just think of it! And now we are old and out of things; but Theodore considers himself the big brother of all the newcomers. And the boys on the newspapers, too; they are all his friends. It makes us so happy."

"You and Governor Bostwick ought to get along," Dan persisted, his platform smile fixed on me. "The *Express* was with him when he was governor."

Bostwick saved me from answering by saying amiably:

"I knew the *Express* better in the old days, before it was sold to its new owners. But it was kind to me while I was governor. It overlooked all my mistakes."

He had the light touch that I had missed from the speech of the other politicians.



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"It will be nice to you again, won't it, if you run for the Senate?" Dan asked.

I could have kicked him. In spite of the speculation about Bostwick trying to take the nomination from Senator McHenry, he had made no statement; besides, as Meredith was necessarily a McHenry man, his remark, especially to a guest, was in atrocious taste.

"I am sure it would be conscientious," Bostwick replied quietly; "especially if the editors are like my young friend here." He made me think of the word "gentleman,"—kindly, poised; even-tempered in the face of provocation. I felt that I was observing the old and the new political type in contrast.

"Alice," Dan threw out as he moved restlessly about the room, "is there any of that stuff that I brought from home?"

His wife obviously pretended she had not heard. "We are keeping our home in Empire," I heard her say to Mrs. Bostwick. "It scarcely seemed wise to take a house here when Mr. Meredith may be here just one term."

"Alice," Dan insisted, "maybe the Governor and his wife would enjoy a little drink."

I saw Alice avert her eyes from Mrs. Bostwick, and there was a moment of awkward silence, painful to her, I knew. The rudeness of Dan's intrusion of the Empire private office manner was almost unbelievable.

"It's getting scarce in our part of the state," he went on, "but I brought along a little that I can guarantee."

"I am afraid we haven't time," Mrs. Bostwick said

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brightly. "Theodore and I are expected now over on the East Side."

She spoke cordially and without any suggestion of reproof. I saw she was capable of being wholly kind to another woman. I wondered then how much she had had to do with her husband's rise. Her tact must have been a great help.

Bostwick agreed. "Some other time, Meredith. Come in and see me any time. Of course, I'm out of politics, but I like to keep in touch with the men who are active; especially the young and promising ones. I know you are going to make a name. Good-by, Mrs. Meredith. Agnes will do anything she can for you, if you run into any difficulties. She has been through it all, you know."

This white-haired but athletic-looking old man, to whom I was drawn by his air of detached gentleness, had made his farewells and had assisted his wife in a painful situation before Dan realized they were actually going. Dan stood fussing with Mrs. Bostwick's wrap, trying to hold it for her, a fixed unnatural smile making him almost comic.

When Alice had closed the apartment door on her guests she walked about straightening the furniture, a figure of anger. Suddenly she stopped in the act of moving a chair and, disregarding my presence, blazed at Dan:

"You certainly covered yourself with glory! I hope you are satisfied!"

Dan pretended to be mystified. "Why? What's the matter now?"

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"What's the matter? Asking a woman like Mrs. Bostwick if she wanted a drink of your bootleg whisky!"

"What's wrong with that? These days it's a big favor to most people to give them a drink. You're in politics now; this isn't Madison Boulevard. Besides, I've given drinks to better people than the Bostwicks."

She studied him, her fingers laced on the back of the chair. She was controlling herself with a visible effort.

"Are you sure? Can't you see they're different from the people you've been used to meeting in politics back home? You've fixed it so she will never be back. You might give me a chance among the women here. And your manner toward that dear old man—insulting. After he was so kind as to come to see you."

Meredith's face darkened.

"Come to see me! Can't you see through that? He's going to run for the Senate. He want's to get in with me. I guess I showed him how much chance he has."

"I don't believe they came with an object! They came because they wanted to be nice to us,—to strangers."

"That's all you know about politics."

"I must be running along," I interposed, wishing to get away from this scene.

Dan, turning as if relieved to remember I was still there, asked me to wait.

"Stay and visit with Alice a while. I've got to go over to the state-house and look over some papers.

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Pretty lonesome for Alice; she gets worked up. Stay and talk to her."

He was affecting joviality. I suspected he was reflecting with satisfaction on the inferences he had permitted Bostwick to draw. Feeling sorry for Alice, disliking to leave her so unhappy, I decided to stay. I hated to think of her sitting in this stuffy little room trying to decide what Mrs. Bostwick thought of her and her husband.

As Meredith went out he tossed back at us, "Maybe she'll give you a highball. No danger of insulting you by offering you good liquor."

Mrs. Meredith motioned me to a chair and indicated the cigars and cigarettes. "I'll get you a drink after a while if you want it," she said. "Wasn't it awful to talk that way before Mrs. Bostwick? What will she think of Dan?"

"I imagine she understood. She has been around a lot. She has seen all types."

"But she is a lady! Asking her if she would have a little drink, in his best barroom style. Well, we've taken you into the family—quarreling before you."

"Please don't fret about it. Other people probably offer the Bostwicks a drink. Of course, his manner could have been different."

She was silent a while; then, evidently remembering I was her guest, she made a polite inquiry about my welfare in Hamilton.

There wasn't much to tell. You can't explain newspaper life to an outsider, but for something to say I

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told her that my job on the *Hamilton Express* was to write editorials in association with Fordyce.

The paper was an afternoon sheet that represented everything new in the new journalism. It was owned by a firm of staccato young publishers who were forming a new chain by buying run-down properties. The *Express* was only the fourth in the chain for the young men were new in the field.

The local executive of the company, whose name appeared on the masthead as publisher, was a young man from New York who naturally held many strong opinions about running a newspaper in Illyria. These opinions formed the policy of the *Express* which Fordyce and I and the rest of the employees were expected to put into practise.

Thinking that a humorous interpretation of this situation might amuse Mrs. Meredith and take her thoughts from her husband, I explained that I was writing the brief, supposedly funny, paragraphs that completed the editorial space—fifteen of them a day. They were to be bright readable comments on anything that should happen, provided the occurrence was far enough away; no local or state subjects were to be touched. After the paragraphs were done I was expected to write two or three long editorials to be run in the columns with the grist of Fordyce's day; these also were to be on subjects from a distance, written in such a way that they could be printed the next day, the next week or the next year. J. Howard Littledale, the young publisher, desired to have always on hand in type a

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supply of editorial-page matter ready to be put into the page. He lived in fear of mechanical accidents and labor trouble that would prevent an issue and jeopardize the revenue. He preferred to have a stock on hand, ready for an emergency. That the editorials produced under such conditions were stale and dull did not matter; the main thing was to be able to fill the space at a moment's notice.

The truth was that Littledale and the other owners of the chain felt that an editorial page was a good deal of a nuisance. Their idea of gaining readers was to add as many of what are called features—comic strips and that sort of thing—and to arrange as many public stunts—prize contests, parades, and athletic tournaments—as possible. News and comment were secondary.

"This job of yours is a cinch," Fordyce had commented. "In fact, it is the ideal newspaper job, the kind most newspaper men dream of, for it will give you a good living and plenty of time for your own affairs. What you should do now is start to write a play or a novel. As long as you show up every day and don't write anything that will offend anybody or disturb the advertising department you will get seventy-five dollars a week. There are five thousand newspaper men who would jump at such a chance."

Fordyce, the head of the editorial page, was not permitted to write anything pertinent either.

"I am getting a hundred and a quarter for my recognized ability to play everything safe," he ex-

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plained. "I have learned my trade well. I can write on both sides of any question in the same article, giving the *Express* the reputation for being fair. Littledale insists the *Express* be fair. We are committed to the people's good, but our real object is to make money and get out of the clutches of the banks.

"This town is full of Kluxers who are being taught to hate the Catholics and the Jews. The Kluxers are circulation; the Jews are advertisers and therefore income. When there's a Ku Klux outbreak I've got to frame a nice editorial that will please the Jews and won't offend the Ku Klux. This is the advanced journalism. A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since those primitive days when editors were foolish enough to risk their property and their lives for a principle. In the present attempt of the Republican state organization to checkmate a Republican who ought to be in the Senate, I'm supposed to write about the tariff. We are both wet and dry, for we want both wets and dries to read us. Follow me closely, Jim; I'm giving a daily exhibition of contortion that would bring tears of envy to Ferry the Frog Man."

The man the Republican organization of Illyria was getting ready to thwart was the former Governor who had just quitted the Meredith apartment. If Theodore Bostwick should try for the nomination for the Senate, the Republicans were going to try to beat him by voting for McHenry, the incumbent, and by inducing Democrats to declare themselves Republicans long enough to vote in the Republican primary for McHenry. If

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Bostwick, in spite of such opposition, should win the nomination, the Republicans would be asked in a quiet way to vote in the fall for Steelyard Smith, who was to have the Democratic nomination unopposed.

The little dark man of the Chicago convention, Senator Thomas Albree, had said in my presence, "I'd a damned sight rather have a Democrat with me in Washington than a renegade Republican like Bostwick."

What he meant was that Bostwick was a renegade because he had followed Roosevelt in 1912. I wondered if Albree had ever heard of Carl Schurz and some other renegades who had revolted against the Republican corruption in Grant's administration. In their day they had been cursed and damned by the old guard who were looting the government just as Bostwick was being cursed and damned now. Fordyce, with his faculty for parallels, had reminded me of this. "I'd like to put that into an editorial," he had said, "but I need my job too bad."

He had pointed out that the only place truth and realism were tolerated in a paper like ours was in the comic strips. "And," he had said, "that is why comic strips are so popular. The paper that makes its editorials as truthful and just as its comics will make a fortune."

A little of this, not much, I tried to put into conversation with Mrs. Meredith, aware that she was following her own thoughts while pretending to listen to me. I didn't care. I had seen too many women turn



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glassy-eyed while listening to a description of newspaper practise.

When I paused she sat gazing into the tiny apartment-house fireplace in which there was no fire. We were sitting facing the mantel as people will where there is one. She was playing with a rope of blue glass beads, her long, bony fingers twining and untwining them in one of those repeated gestures which usually predict an inquiry betraying anxiety. As I suspected, she had been waiting for me to get through. She asked abruptly:

"Do you know a woman here in Hamilton named Fitch?"

"You must mean Carolyn Fitch," I replied. "She is an applicant for one of the women's positions in the state Republican organization. She hasn't got it yet."

"Do you know her?"

"On sight. I have seen her holding up men she thinks can help her get what she wants."

"Is she a Miss or a Mrs.?"

"Mrs. Fitch. I think she comes from Albion where her husband is postmaster, or something. She looks about thirty-two or three. The job she wants is to keep the women of the state thinking they have something to say in party affairs. Politics is still a man's business, but the leaders can't admit it. They meet the situation with a women's organization."

"She seems to have a lot of business with Dan."

"You will have to get used to that. Women like Mrs. Fitch always have lots of business with men. Men are

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their main business. She probably is getting acquainted with Dan on purpose. She wants his influence with others in landing the position she is after. She has adopted politics as a career, just like a man. It's something new."

She got up and walked to the window, looking down into the square with its equestrian statue of Grant.

"She is always calling him up."

"That's nothing. From now on, women will be calling him up all the time. He is party property."

"I don't understand it."

"That is because you don't understand your husband's profession. You will have to endure her; you may have to be nice to her. If Dan is going to rise he will have to be polite to one Carolyn Fitch after another. He can't afford to have her ill-will."

"It used to be so simple when I was a girl at home. Politics was always something father attended to downtown. Mother never gave it a thought, any more than she gave the store a thought."

There was nothing to say to that. She stood for women before the war, before the vote, before prohibition, before a lot of things.

"Mrs. Bostwick could be a great help to you," I said, getting up to go. "You'd better go to see her soon, for if Governor Bostwick comes out for the Senate Dan will be against him and won't let you go."

She turned to me in surprise.

"Dan doesn't have anything to say about my friends."

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I hesitated, then I said:

"Not in Empire; not in your private life. But this is different. He may ask you not to see some women; he may ask you to make friends with some you dislike."

"Oh! I see what you mean. He wants me to invite Mrs. Fitch to dinner."

"There! You see! That's politics."

"And I must; is that it?"

"You must unless you prefer to stay in Empire and give out that your health forbids your taking part. You and Dan are in something like the Methodist ministry where the congregation buys the services of both preacher and wife."

"I see; and if I don't give mine it will hurt Dan."

"Exactly; especially with the women. You don't dare offend any of them when he is depending on them or their husbands to help him."

For a moment she seemed to soften.

"I'm willing to try. But it's going to be hard. You see how far apart we are; you see how he acted with Mrs. Bostwick about the liquor. Must we always have drinks?"

She was pathetic when she added:

"Dan seems to hate me sometimes because I can't drink with him the way he likes. I never learned . . . I feel it right away."

She seemed to know there was no answer I could make to that, for she shook hands and said, "Thank you, Jim; you seem like one of the family. Come often."

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As I left her I was pondering what the result would be if I continued to develop sympathy for Dan Meredith's wife when I was expected to reserve it all for him. She deserved sympathy, not through any charm of her own, but on account of her predicament. She had been impressed without training into service in a war fought with weapons strange to her. I could see trouble coming for her from complications such as the approach of Carolyn Fitch, which might or might not be political. Yet there was the element that defied analysis, which was not susceptible to logic. If Alice lacked the appeal to Dan's emotions; if she was, as I was beginning to believe, a stranger to his true nature, she was beaten before she began.

I tried to brush the whole complication away, telling myself I was not directly interested. This effort, however, lasted only till I got back to my room, for on the table was a special delivery letter in the stationery of the Deshler Hotel, in Columbus; and in the return space was written, "L. Fife." She wrote:

"Dixon, who is with me again [I already knew this] tells me you are in Hamilton. We are getting a new piece ready here. Wouldn't you like to come over for as much of the week-end as you can spare? I would like to talk to you about something important to me. You see, I am always selfish. Dixon, I fancy, would atone to you. Anyhow, wire."

The *Express* was an afternoon paper that did not publish on Sunday so I telegraphed that I would be in

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Columbus on Saturday afternoon or evening. By leaving Hamilton Friday evening and driving a hundred and fifty miles by midnight, I could make it easily the following day, as those who are familiar with the geography of Illyria will understand.

I made Indianapolis between twelve and one and slept at the Severin. I was up and away early enough to reach Columbus as early Saturday afternoon as my well-worn tires would permit.

As I drove along High Street past the Ohio capitol I noticed for the first time the statue of William McKinley. I meant no disrespect for that product of his times when I thought that if the men I knew best in Illyria were right, a figure of Daniel Scott Meredith might stand some day before the temple of government in the city of Hamilton.

Meredith was not equipped by nature or by training for a high public trust, but he seemed much more likely to be given one than Theodore Bostwick, who had been tested and found competent. What editorial writers liked to call the will of the people must be, I concluded, a myth. What really counted was the will of Senator Thomas Albree, who moved the pieces on the chess-board of Illyria politics.

## CHAPTER IX

ON MY solitary drive to Columbus I had developed an attitude toward Dixon. We had not met since our failure to bring Meredith and Laurel Fife together in Chicago. Though I could have gone to see her after John Fordyce and I had taken Meredith to his hotel, I had not. Instead, embarrassed by the failure and the fear that my value in her eyes, being based on my ability to help her serve Laurel, had been made to appear inconsequential, I wrote her saying that I had found our man, but he could not keep the engagement and that I must go with him to Empire. I said I would come back to Chicago soon to see her, but I didn't go. I suppose my pride, or rather my vanity, was involved, for when she did not reply to my note I decided to give her an opportunity of ending the episode if she wished.

Through 1920 and 1921 I worked in Empire without renewing the acquaintance, but just before I moved to the state capital I heard from her. It was a bare inquiry, written from a New York address, asking, "Jim, what did you ever do about those stories you were going to write?"

I had done, I thought, enough. I had finished *Madame Peggy* and had sent it to ten or twelve magazines; and before the series of refusals had broken my determination I had begun and completed another, a

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study of an Empire stenographer entitled *Emma*. Like *Madame Peggy*, *Emma* had been declined by all the leading magazines and now lay in the bottom of my trunk in my furnished room in Hamilton.

So I had forsaken the arts. Like everybody I ever knew who wrote stories that failed, I privately considered mine quite as good as those the editors were buying and publishing; but mine obviously were not wanted, so I had made the decision that is usual when hopes are frustrated—I would devote my talents exclusively to the thing I could do. Newspaper work, I decided, was as necessary as fiction. I see now I was functioning to Freud.

Dixon's unexpected inquiry, however, disturbed me, causing me to think of reconsidering, the more so as my labors on the *Hamilton Express* were to consist of going through the motions of journalism without being required to expend any thought on what I did, except such thought as might be needed for the search for safe subjects. Why Dixon's question should have started me off again I didn't know, for I had hardened myself toward her, I thought, securely. But instead of simply replying that the stories had proved to be no good and I was a literary failure, I found myself being just vague enough to let her draw the inference that my arrival as a creative artist of prominence was only temporarily delayed by the conflicting demands on my time. If I were not so busy on important matters requiring my attention my stories would be appearing. I did not write this to her but I hoped she would reach

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that conclusion. What really was the matter with me was that I wanted to magnify myself in her eyes. She was so gifted as an actress, so certainly on the way to recognition, that I felt useless. All my interests seemed petty. To be myself would be to lack all hope of interesting her. What I must do, I believed, was lift myself to her plane.

Knowing I was to see her in Columbus I began to see myself treating her distantly, with just a trace of pain and regret. I would be polite, and as anxious as usual to please Laurel, but I would avoid all intimate references, turn aside all personal allusions. I would give out that I was on the inside of government in one of the most important states in the Middle West, the repository of confidences, the counselor of men in high places. It was impossible for me to do justice to my private attachments, such as my writing. I was a victim of circumstances, but, having been chosen for such a rôle, I was prepared to make the sacrifice for my friends. The implication of this might be, as Dixon could see, that I was ready to make sacrifices for other friends; but if they were too self-centered to grasp my willingness I could go no farther. I was in that exalted mood, the result of driving between three and four hundred miles alone, when I called Miss Fife's room at the Deshler.

Dixon answered. Like a woman, she did not give me time to be haughty, but responded with what sounded like pleasure, "Oh, I am so glad you are here; you are to come right up."

That and the time of day made it difficult for me.



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It was the entrancing city hour of half past five when I had always been happiest; the hour that always had the power of making me want to be rich with nothing to do. It had always been best in November when, after a college football game, there could be a reunion with old friends in a bright, comfortable, crowded room with waiters hurrying toward us with just what was necessary. The expectation of dinner and a theater invited one to relax and think of Monday as some time next year. The new amendment had broken that up; bottles in cars, grandstands and hotel rooms could not recreate the true atmosphere of half past five. It was still my time, however, and in mid-March it had a quality that made it hard for me to remember accurately the manner I had intended to use with Dixon. When I was going up I found myself hoping she would be alone; I even hoped she would give the impression of having meant to be alone.

She was; and as she was dressed for the evening, standing there in the sitting-room of Laurel Fife's suite, I imagined she could feel the spell of half past five and was yielding to it. A glimpse I had had of myself in the elevator mirror had restored my humility; my face, I was reminded, was very thin and very serious in repose; and my hair was incurably rural in spite of all the barbers could do. Hopeful reading of all the optical advertisements had failed to reveal any spectacles that would make me look anything but owlish. I was simply permanently homely; I certainly did not look like the person to carry off a situation with the pose I had constructed.

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Dixon did not give me a chance. "Jim" she exclaimed, "it does my heart good to see you again. You are to have dinner with us. Come and sit down. Laurel won't be in till seven; she was sorry she couldn't be here when you came . . . it was like you to drop everything and come all this distance."

That was my cue to refer to all the things I had had to break away from, but with a girl as lovely as Dixon, all I could do was sit uneasily on a shallow hotel sofa and look at her. I tried to remember what it was that had made it hard for me to get away from Hamilton, but I couldn't. I did remember how polite and dignified I had intended to be, but when she suddenly left her chair across the room and came over to sit sideways in the end of the sofa, facing me, I did not know how to begin.

"Jim," she said eagerly, "before we are interrupted, what about your work,—I mean your real work? Are you sure enough doing something? I'm awfully interested in you, Jim; I don't care if you won't believe it. You have it in you to do something . . ."

"I wrote you,—two short stories; but they've come back from everywhere. What are you doing?"

"Same old thing. We are going to keep the conversation on you. How old are you now, Jim?"

"Twenty-six."

"You have no right to be down-hearted about your stories coming back. Just to show you what kind of a girl I am, I have done a lot of looking up. Twenty-eight or thirty is time enough to break in, but you ought

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to be doing a lot of preparatory work now. Carter, the playwright, you know,—he's here with us; it's his play,—says he couldn't write a thing till he was thirty-two; says he wasn't old enough."

Before I could make an inane reply she added, "Jim, will you let me see those stories? Will you send them to me? We open in Cleveland Monday night; then we lay off a week or two to work on the piece some more. You could send them to me there."

I didn't answer right away; and before I could come to my senses she had leaned the length of the sofa to put a hand over one of mine and look at me at very close range. I had a disturbing sense of her hair.

"What's the matter, Jim? Don't you trust me any more?"

Under those conditions I could not do anything about my prepared attitude. It would have been unchivalrous, if nothing else. Her gesture and her proximity were such delicious and strange experiences that they gave me the mad thought that, if I had been a normal-looking fellow, I would have kissed her.

I sat there looking back into her intense eyes and saying, "Of course I trust you; I'll send them to you." I think I said it two or three times.

"It is more than just the stories, Jim. It's you. You are a funny fellow: there's something I can't explain. You know how you make me feel? You are looking on at a lot of things you meet in your work and politics, things that are terrible and wrong, and you don't know what to do about them or about yourself;

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and because nearly everybody prominent you know is doing them and getting on in the world, you will naturally come to think they are all right and that there is no use struggling or holding out for anything better. And that's wrong and I don't want you to do it. That is one reason I want you to be working at something all your own in dreadful earnest. Now,—don't try to tell me I haven't been thinking about you."

She had been talking rapidly in a low vibrant voice, a delight to hear.

"I have never analyzed it; you may be right."

"I know I'm right. You have shown in your manner, in little things, the three times we've been together, that you were seeing a lot of ugliness and it was making you ugly because you were accepting it. Oh, Jim! Please, don't you see? I want you to believe in something . . ."

Before I knew what I was saying I had asked her a brief harsh question, "Why?"

With a smile she drew away from me. As she did so I thought something glistened under an eyelid. She kept smiling, though, and answered:

"I should not tell you but I shall. It is because I want anybody who is near to me to be . . . right; and to know it."

She walked across the room and stood poking at her bewitching short hair before a long gilt mirror. Presently she wheeled and faced me.

"I know all about it. You won't find it in the answers to questions in the New York theater programs,

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but I know how easy it is to go along and accept things as they are. I would be doing it too, if Laurel hadn't taken charge of me a few years ago. She taught me how to live."

She was marvelously right in her reproof, but an attitude of amused and disinterested tolerance was the fashion; had been since the war. I am afraid I said so.

"Yes; I know it is the fashion. That's the trouble with all you bright young men to-day. It's the fashion to be amused by everything. Nothing makes you sick!"

There was scorn in her voice and she had ceased smiling. I suddenly came to life.

"Dixon! I'm not like that. I have held out against Dan Meredith."

That was true, even though, for the rest, I had been as she had accused. On that she came over again and sat down, speaking in a different tone, infinitely kind.

"Then . . . will you try to show me?"

It was I who put out a hand then. Curiously, I was not afraid any more. I touched one of hers and she did not withdraw it.

"I'll try. I'll send you the stories."

We sat there a long time without speaking. She was leaning back as if tired, and her eyes were closed. I think that if Laurel had been five minutes later coming in I might have kissed Dixon. Afterward I let myself imagine that she would not have objected.

Laurel had come in before either of us heard her and was standing in the center of the room working at the fingers of her gloves and smiling at us. I gazed—it

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probably was more a stare—for while her beauty was unforgettable there was something always new about it that set a man thinking when he should have been getting to his feet and going up to her. She said intimately:

“Hello, Jim.”

And instead of the pre-war dancing-school speech I would ordinarily have made I grinned and said, “Hello.”

“Say ‘Hello, Laurel’.”

“Hello, Laurel.”

“That’s better.”

She took off her little gray felt hat and this cape business the women were wearing on the street in 1922—hers was gray like wet sand only not cold-looking; and that was the color of the dress under it. She sat now, motioning me to a chair, watching Dixon as she took the hat and cape into the next room.

“You are staying with us,” she went on. “There’s your key.” She took it out of her bag. “We shall have some dinner here.”

She must have been thirty that year. The never-ending search for a play; the rehearsals, openings, short runs and closings had not dulled her. She looked just as keen, just as confident, as she had in Empire two years before. The only difference I noted was a tendency to fall silent and sit looking at her folded hands from which she would raise her eyes with a surprised expression when spoken to. Her coloring—an impression of browns and reds from hair, lips and skin—was as

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rich as full autumn in the country, and the life she expressed when she stood or walked was symptomatic of a personality fulfilled, shadowed only by this inclination toward momentary reverie.

"I think poor Carter has something this time. It will be called *The Enchantress* if we take it into New York, but we're going to do it a few weeks outside under another name. I wish I could work a season or two in something like *The Bat* or *The Cat and the Canary* so the acting wouldn't matter. I'm tired, something you don't dare to be when the whole thing is built up around you. I'm in the same boat as Lenore Ulric, Katharine Cornell and Jeanne Eagles,—I can't afford to stop and think about anything. The people out front have their idea of me; I've got to maintain it."

One of those muffled knocks waiters use when they are bringing a meal to a hotel room stopped her.

"Call Colin, will you, Dixon?" Laurel asked as the waiters carried in the two trestle tables covered with dishes and silver. "He said he'd be in his room. Let me run and look at my hair."

So Colin Hay came in and the four of us made our party in front of the windows that looked down toward the state capitol, giving me occasional glimpses to remind me of Dan Meredith and of Laurel's incurable desire.

What I got out of the dinner was that Colin Hay, attached to the production of *The Enchantress* as stage director, was in love with the star. I had never seen

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devotion so accurately expressed in table talk and gestures. Second meeting showed me that, as Dixon had suggested in Chicago, Colin Hay was a real person. I gathered over that week-end that he was an Englishman, that he had been wounded at Mons, and, in spite of the family devastation that had required the lives of three brothers in battle, he had picked up his life, in London and New York, and was now a director any producer was glad to get.

And Laurel was touched by Colin Hay's affection. She bent toward him all the pretty attitudes and attentions of which he was worthy, and when it came time to send him off with Dixon to a film—for nothing was to be done now to the play before the opening in Cleveland—she conveyed the news that she wanted an hour with me in a tone that was considerate of his evident sensitiveness. I was glad she did. Now that I knew Hay was Laurel's slave and not Dixon's I was able to recognize all his good qualities and hoped Laurel would not overlook any of them.

When they had gone, Laurel came over to where I was and stood looking up at me steadily, her brown eyes full of insistent inquiry.

"How is he?"

"He's all right; he's holding office now, you know."

"Yes, I subscribe to a Hamilton paper to keep up."

"Well, he's all right. They have an apartment there; they will live between there and Empire. He's going to get along."

"What will the next thing be, for him?"



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"They may run him for governor in 1924; after that I don't know; the Senate, maybe."

"What do you think of him?"

"I like him."

"Yes; but . . ."

What she meant was, does he ever speak of me?

"He is not happy."

"You mean . . . at home?"

"Not that so much. You don't know the type. Some men don't expect to be happy at home. They don't worry if they're not. He belongs to that crowd."

"But what do you mean, then, about his not being happy?"

"I mean he hasn't the ability to enjoy success; to make something of a prize after he gets it. He is there because he got started in that direction, as so many young fellows do, without thinking. About the time you knew him he was told he was going to have a career and he's having it; but he would be more natural, easier, running a farm. He bought one this year."

"Not to live on?"

"No; just to run away to, to play with; like a man with a carpenter's bench and tool chest in the cellar. I have seen it; he took me with him one day."

"You have a queer idea of Scott; different from mine."

"I am trying to give it to you as I see it. Life isn't very real to him; it's terribly flat. Things happen to him without his having anything to say or choosing,—advancements, I mean."

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"Why doesn't he quit?"

"That's what I asked him. There's a queer strain in these politicians. You seldom hear of one quitting. They imagine they are intended, destined, for something. I wish you could see him, really know him. You would get over your feeling for him."

She walked to a chair and sat down rather suddenly, as if all at once she was weary.

"I need one of two things, to get over it, or——But I can't put the alternative into words. I am not doing good work. Here I am wasting my time in dear Charlie Carter's play, with him and Colin and the rest hoping it will go over and let me in for another long run. Carter wants me to have a success as much as he wants one for himself; he's that generous. But it won't go over; not with me. The play is all right, but I'm not. I have begged them to try to get Jane Cowl."

"You would be all right if you could put this fellow out of your mind."

"I have two kinds of feelings. I can say truthfully I love Colin Hay. I always feel warm and kind, loyal and true, when I think of him. We are suited in everything, but it is all reasonable and calm. This other feeling, the thing that pulls me toward Scott and wears me out with thinking, is entirely different. It has nothing to do with congeniality or his character or mine, or even with right and wrong. It is unreasonable in every way, but that does not make it less real or less strong."

I did not reply, and in a moment she went on.

"If you can arrange it, I want to go to Hamilton and

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see him. I can do it while we are trying out this piece. Can't I see him there? Perhaps in his office."

"Not you; not in his office. Other women might do that. You shouldn't."

"Then where? I've got to see him. If I go into New York with *The Enchantress* I've got to feel that I'm alive. This thing is taking everything out of me. I owe it to Charlie Carter to keep the play from failing. But that isn't my first reason. It's hard to explain, but this man has controlled me ever since I was with him in Atlantic City. Call it love if you want to. It isn't the same thing that I feel for Colin. It's something you can't argue about."

"I might think of some way. But I warn you, he is not the man you have in your mind."

"How can I help that? I can't change my desires. They drive me. It's a wonder I've been able to accomplish what I have,—unsatisfied. If we could have an hour, Scott and I, in which we could beat back to that time; if we could understand together that no matter what has happened since, we were drawn together then and will always have a sort of compact—love, if you insist—apart from everything and everybody else. I am not making myself clear. I feel it; I could say it to him, but it isn't definite enough to explain to another, Jim."

There were wet patches on her cheeks, and her voice was shaking.

"I feel he needs me; needs the kind of thing I can give him. And I need him. For myself, I am not asking much; almost nothing."

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I assented to the first part of that.

"God knows he needs you. The lack of anything high in his life—take love; there's a lack of that. His wife is helpless to love him, and he can't love her. They don't meet. He doesn't dislike her especially; their life together is simply barren. That must be the worst kind. You couldn't say they ever were truly married."

"I don't want anything except to go to him and try to . . . I don't know. But I've got to go. I don't need to say I'm not trying to take him away from his wife."

"You run the risk of being misunderstood . . . and hurt. People aren't supposed to believe in that kind of love these days. Suppose this were a scene on the stage . . . the audience would laugh."

She ignored that.

"When we are together the years will dissolve. He will be the same as he was then. He will not misunderstand."

Her eyes dared me to challenge that faith. So I said, "Let me write you at Cleveland or wherever you will be in a week or two."

And she said, "All right, Jim;" and that was all of my contact with Laurel Fife on that trip.

The next day was all Dixon's and mine. She suggested church, saying she wanted to go; and so we went, to the nine o'clock mass at the first Roman Catholic Church we came to. As we went up the steps she told me:

"I was brought up by a father who was so rabidly

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Protestant that he believed the basement of every Catholic church was an arsenal where the rifles would be given out when word should come from the Pope to seize the country. The result is that I was always curious about Catholicism and when I went on my own I began to learn what I could about it. I have always needed a great deal of love and kindness and have had a great deal of it from priests and sisters I have known here and there. I suppose you'd call me a technical Protestant with a Catholic view-point."

She said this earnestly; there was nothing light in her manner at that moment. And the hour left me tingling with some new thoughts about her. I was accustomed to girls who by habit deferred to the common avoidance of anything serious. She deferred to nothing, but expressed herself with an even devotion to her convictions. No wonder she had chided me, I reflected, for what she had interpreted as a complacent attitude.

Afterward we drove out north of the city and sat in the car looking at the Olentangy River and talking. Dixon's gaze under her dark brows, and her lips that were so full of minute, sensitive movement when she was thinking, gravely or humorously, made me contented just to sit beside her and watch. Every once in a while I would move and catch a glimpse of myself in the rear-vision mirror. This made me wonder if the situation could be real. She told me a little of herself.

"I am one of Laurel Fife's good works. She took me, practically from an alley in Philadelphia like the fairy in Cinderella. I must tell you about that some time.

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You might write it. James Branch Cabell says somewhere that the Cinderella story is the most popular ever told. You know that variations on it are almost sure fire in the theater, so I suppose they must be in stories for the magazines."

We had lunch together and then it was time for me to start back to Hamilton. As we were standing in the lobby, Charles Carter came by and stopped to speak to Dixon, who introduced me.

"Jim is just starting to write, Charlie," she said, putting me on record again. I would, I reflected, have to get something printed in order to make her an honest woman.

The playwright had that look of power, of great physical strength, that famous college half-backs have when they come to be fifty. He was very definite in his words, almost vehement in the way he spoke them. He had a right to be: his half-dozen successful plays were proof that he did not talk idly. He asked me what I had written.

"Just some short stories; nothing published. They are sort of *Atlantic Monthly* stories, I guess."

"Hell," he said, "you'll never get anywhere thinking that way. The only kind of story for you to write, in fact, the only kind you can write, is a Jim Preston story,—that's your name, isn't it? Take Ring Lardner or this new writer, Fitzgerald; Hergesheimer in his own way. Your story is you; that's all there is to that. Dialogue for example,—my son tells me he has run into an American over in Paris who is writing dialogue

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just like people talk. He never writes a word of literary dialogue; won't do it. You see he's being himself. All the good ones do that. You write the stories of Jim Preston . . ."

He hurried away.

"Isn't he lovely?" Dixon murmured, looking after the athletic figure going down the lobby. "Charlie is a darling,—he is as romantic as the eighteen-nineties but he imagines he is as modern as Lardner. Well . . ."

It was "Well, good-by."

I stood there awkwardly, my bag at my feet. There was nothing to do but go, and yet I did not move.

"Are you all right?" Dixon asked.

"How do you mean?"

"Everything settled in your mind? You're not going to start imagining again that you don't like me?"

"Dixon!"

"Going to behave yourself in your mind and get to work?"

"I promise."

"Then just stroll down this corridor with me to where you see those palms and the big screen."

If David Copperfield had been compelled to drive through London just after meeting Dora Spenlow he would not have been more erratic than I was in getting out of Columbus that afternoon.

## CHAPTER X

THEODORE BOSTWICK had decided to run for the United States Senate. This is putting it bluntly, at the risk of offending the remaining few who like to imagine that the office seeks the man and that Americans choose their officers. The laws of most of the states have repudiated the pretty legend of Cincinnatus. They require that he who would immolate himself on the altar of public service must first make a declaration of his intentions. Nobody is permitted to creep on the people unaware to save them from their oppressors. Due notice in writing must be given by all saviors of the people.

So Bostwick filed with the Secretary of Public Affairs—or rather with his chief clerk, for Dan Meredith spent little time in his office—a petition for a place on the primary ballot. He entered the race on the last day for making declarations, when the leaders of the Republican organization had begun to breathe easily in the belief that he was going to stay out. They disliked him much and feared him more because he did not play the game according to their rules. Bostwick had asked nobody's permission to run. This was the worst of bad form in political society.

Bostwick lived by the theory that offices should be filled by men chosen for character and attainments and



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should be held through merit, not through the labors of persons benefited by distribution of appointments and contracts. From the point of view of what was called the State Committee, composed of the chairmen of the congressional districts, this was decidedly irregular and dangerous. It was a threat against organization. It smacked of dictatorship. No matter how much Bostwick might know about the questions with which a senator is expected to deal, he had been tacitly outlawed by the powers of his own party in his state.

Senator McHenry, the incumbent, whose term was expiring and whom Bostwick had decided to oppose, was a good organization man, one who fitted the scheme of things as they were. McHenry was as tall and as dark as a schoolboy's idea of Samson. He was as distinguished in his appearance as his colleague, Senator Albree, was insignificant; but there the superiority ended. For our diminutive Senator, one of the smallest men who ever sat in the Upper House, was not only a storage-battery of political energy; he was as sagacious as he was tiny. McHenry looked like a dictator; Albree was one.

Albree preferred his large, bland, mediocre associate to an abler one. With a senator in the junior seat who really knew something, one with opinions who would insist on expressing them, Senator Albree's supremacy would be threatened. As the instinct of self-preservation is stronger in little men than in those of normal proportions, Albree was for a continuation of McHenry. He abhorred Bostwick for being a Progressive and

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would have opposed him to the end on that score; but he also found McHenry's presence in the Senate reassuring to his own future.

Another reason the party chiefs were hostile to Bostwick was his disturbing popularity with the voters. Political workers, I inferred, do not care for candidates who are too popular. There is always the danger that they will run away with the situation and make workers superfluous. Every campaign must be made to seem difficult if the workers are to have profitable jobs.

The people liked Bostwick. Judgments based on the sizes of the audiences that appeared whenever he spoke led to the belief that men and women—it was impossible to predict how many—would be glad to vote for him. It is an interesting paradox of American politics that a man with a large following of voters is not usually welcomed as a candidate by those who make a business of staffing and controlling the government.

Bostwick had another disqualification from the professional politician's standpoint. He was conscientiously opposed to the growing custom of making unholy alliances with racial, religious and occupational groups in advance of election. That these alliances might be formed with groups whose objectives were technically holy did not alter his attitude.

This also was irregular and dangerous to the organization mind. The admired strategy was to be solid with as many groups as possible. That the groups might be in conflict did not matter so long as they could

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be counted on to cast their votes in large blocks. I had heard it said, too, that Bostwick was opposed to accepting heavy financial contributions from corporations and especially from men interested in obtaining access to natural resources. This was all very trying to the Illyria Republicans of 1922.

If a man could be elected to the Senate on Bostwick's ideas, going to Washington free from all entangling alliances and encumbrances, no telling where he would end. He might be elected president; and if he should, the spirit of Roosevelt would return to the White House, for Bostwick was still just as much a Roosevelt man as he had ever been.

The primary system of making nominations permitted Bostwick to go directly to the people. Having announced his candidacy, he began to tour the state, making just the kind of speech the organization feared. He had not studied the lives of men for nothing; he knew how to talk to audiences; and his carefully prepared utterances that were sent to the newspapers in advance indicated a man capable of analyzing problems and arriving at lucid, convincing solutions. Moreover, he memorized his thoughtfully constructed speeches and seldom departed from the text. In short, he was a serious worker. The reporters soon saw the difference between him and the ordinary candidate who, lazy, assured, and indifferent, depended upon wit and the easy weapon of detraction and innuendo to influence hearers.

I think it was agreed that in spite of his faults, Bostwick was a man with whom the state could be

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satisfied. He might not be a Clay or Calhoun, but his people would never have reason to blush for him; and, as Fordyce pointed out, that was beginning to be a consideration. His nomination and election were taken for granted by the nation. Newspapers outside the state began to speak of him as certain of going to Washington.

I have said that by becoming a candidate and not waiting to be called he was doing what the laws required. One of the results of what is termed progress is this direct primary which has done away with the possibility of the people summoning a man to serve them. Proposed and adopted as an instrument of reform, it had come in Illyria to operate chiefly as a statutory bar from office to good men who happened to be too modest to stalk preferment. Besides, keen, unscrupulous minds were quick to see that whoever could control a compact faction able to cast the most votes in a party nominating primary would indeed be the actual ruler of the state. Such a mind was that which, people were beginning to say, had seen the possibility of controlling Republican nominations in the near-by state of Indiana by casting all or most of the Ku Klux Klan vote. The owner of that mind would be the dictator of Indiana. Some men believed the same situation would come to pass in Illyria.

Illyria being Republican, to control the Republican nomination for governor or senator was to control the election; and if the favored candidate had accepted in advance the support of groups, giving promises to do

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their bidding once he was in office, the officials of such groups became the actual government. Their objectives were the dictation of strategic appointments, especially those having to do with expenditures and with the police powers, and the direction of legislation favorable to their causes.

Some of these men had been active in bringing prohibition into effect. Like many of the anti-slavery reformers left over in the Civil War reconstruction era, they were to be found on the side of the Republican old guard or actually a part of it.

As the reformers of the 'fifties condoned the Republican corruption of the 'sixties and 'seventies for the sake of a complete victory over the South, those of the dry movement were being found, after the success of their special measure, in the councils of the Republican machine in states like Ohio, Illinois, Illyria, Michigan and Indiana. They were welcomed by the machine leaders because they were supposed to be able to deliver the dry vote whenever it was needed. According to their own statements, their sole object was to keep the country dry. So zealous were they that they were not to be shocked or outraged by evidences of cynical exploitation of office for private gain as long as the offenders were officially dry. One gained the impression that a public officer might steal if he were only dry, just as it was given to others in power fifty years earlier to loot the government provided they terrorized the defeated and helpless South and humiliated and harassed without mercy the leaders of the Confederacy.

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This situation could not have been intended by the earnest, serious citizens who had formed the voting strength for prohibition; it had come about through the tendency of their official representatives to identify themselves with the party in power.

Bostwick's candidacy, of course, looked hopeless. He lacked not only the good will of the existing Republican control: he also lacked the approval of the Ku Klux Klan which, since the war, had become a factor in the vote. This body was reaching its zenith, with such a cohesive and disciplined membership that it was supposed no Republican could be elected to a state office without its sanction.

So slight did Bostwick's chances seem that the regular Republicans did not take his threat against McHenry seriously. They could not see how Bostwick could be nominated. The machinery was constructed and operated to prevent automatically the success of an outsider. So the campaign at first was neglected.

The Republican newspapers of Illyria generally were for McHenry's renomination, not because they had convictions but because they were sure he would win. They wanted to be with the winner. There was no circulation or prestige in forlorn hopes; no favors in Washington for publishers who had been wrong. The business managers of the larger papers saw the necessity of being for Senator McHenry, who certainly would go back. They wanted to be able to exact his influence for lower postal rates and for broadcasting-station privileges.

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You are gathering the impression that this senatorial contest was not being decided on the merits and issues. That is correct. It was being decided on irrelevancies. For example, there was the Bostwick summer home on Long Island, bought by Mrs. Bostwick with part of a small legacy she had received while her husband was governor. Bostwick himself had always been a man of means and property. He was the head of a manufacturing business that had been in his family for three generations, and nobody had thought anything about his private substance until one of the New York newspapers published a picture of his eastern residence in a group of shore places. One of the Hamilton papers—not mine—sent for the picture and reproduced it on the Sunday society page with a portrait of Mrs. Bostwick. This was an innocent bit of newspaper enterprise, done without malicious intention. But that week a speaker for McHenry referred to the picture, suggesting the possibility of Illyria getting an absentee senator and alluding to the Bostwick millions. This orator described the delights of Illyria's vacation spots, its lakes and woods, implying that the Bostwicks were repudiating the state that had done so much for them by choosing Long Island for a playground.

It is worth while to notice this incident, for it is characteristic of American politics. This minor and wholly irrelevant subject became for a time the crux of the campaign. The issue was not the relative ability of the two men who desired the nomination, but the purchase of a cottage at the seashore. The speakers

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did not fail to picture the Bostwicks sitting on their veranda, fanned by ocean breezes and surrounded by wealthy easterners, contrasting them in that setting with the perspiring toilers of Illyria panting for breath through one of our smothering Mississippi Valley summers.

One speaker saw danger of Bostwick falling under the influence of British propagandists and working in Washington for the cancellation of the war debts. One would have thought that Long Island was foreign territory, the way the Bostwick cottage was magnified on the platform.

The two Hamilton newspapers other than ours seized the suggestion and used it editorially, attempting to inflame the voters against Bostwick. Editorial writers—who, it must be remembered, were probably mere employees and without executive authority—planted the thought that Bostwick's eastern environment would place him under the influence of Wall Street. The term "Wall Street" is poisonous in the villages and rural sections of Illyria. By the clever use of suggestion, with libel as cleverly evaded, irresponsibles without sound knowledge of the facts tried to nullify all the good Bostwick had done as governor and attempted to belittle his obvious virtues and impugn his motives.

I was glad for once that the *Express* was intentionally colorless. If I had been ordered to concoct innuendo against Bostwick, using his summer home as a text, I should have been in a dilemma, for I was not ready to quit Hamilton. Not that I was virtuous; but



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at this time I was still young enough to retain some shreds of my original sense of the mission of the press. Edmund Burke's definition of the Fourth Estate was still my motto.

While to obtain a senatorship and sustain the position afterward had become so costly that the undertaking required substantial private means, party officers liked to keep alive the fiction that to appeal for votes a candidate should be poor. So the spokesmen for McHenry referred piously to the poor man of the people Bostwick was attempting to displace. The truth was that McHenry was a wealthy man, but he had been acute enough to conceal his investments in other states, so they did not stand between him and the people of Illyria. These foreign investments of his had been made with the additional purpose of evading the Illyria tax laws, and so, with Bostwick's means originating in an Illyria enterprise that gave employment to several hundred men, McHenry's case was the reprehensible one; but it was easy to avoid this comparison by referring constantly to Bostwick's millions and his Long Island estate. The organization was justified in thinking the contest safe for McHenry.

In opposing Bostwick it was conspicuously necessary to magnify unimportant things, not only to prejudice voters against him but also to keep attention away from his well-known ability and his notable achievements. Thus was the object of the direct primary defeated. The official strategy was to make people suspicious of a man whom, through four years of

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his governorship, they had learned to respect and trust.

Dan Meredith was assigned to the defeat of Bostwick in one end of the state. In return for the office he had been handed the previous year, he was expected to help make certain that McHenry would carry twenty-seven counties. He was not solely responsible, of course; other men, chosen by Seneca Giles, of Empire, were to assist in the work of detraction and insinuation. It was part of Dan's business to see that the agents of the office of Secretary of Public Affairs in all the counties—his deputies—questioned as a part of their day's work the fitness of Theodore Bostwick to sit in the Senate.

The thing was a pattern. Governor Spencer, who had succeeded Bostwick, could cause certain of his appointees in the state-house and scattered through the counties to work for McHenry. Small salaried employees of the State Highway Department, of the tax-gathering office, were expected to pay for their tenure by being good organization men. The same word would be passed among the county employees of every courthouse until the state should be liberally spotted with workers who drew their wages from the public funds while devoting their energies not to their routine duties but to swelling McHenry's probable vote.

Even the staffs of the state institutions—the hospitals, asylums, and penal houses—were given to understand that the administration was for McHenry. If a hospital board was ordering its next winter's coal it would have to be sure that the coal dealer, his family,

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friends and employees, and their families and friends, were going to vote in the June primary for the candidate who stood for the existing system. That this was contrary to the letter and spirit of the corrupt practises act was not even considered. The rule was an adaptation of the old epigram, "What is the Constitution between friends?"

One portent was favorable to Bostwick. His campaign manager was the same Jack Marberry whom I had met in Empire as Harding's manager for the state of Illyria. Marberry made a business of managing candidates. He was in every campaign, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. He had a reputation to maintain, for he had never managed a loser, and his fees were based on his success. If Bostwick should be defeated it would be Marberry's first major failure.

Nobody knew much about Marberry, but he knew everything about everybody of consequence in Illyria. It was said that he could borrow money on his own signature from any bank in the state. His business was founded on information and acquaintance; to these he added an unusual intuition. Marberry was with Bostwick; that was something. But in April it looked as if this time the odds were too heavy. The state was staffed with McHenry men and women. Small wonder then that few persons could see how Bostwick could be nominated. The machine was functioning perfectly in all its parts; and it could take care of a greater man than Theodore Bostwick.

My conclusions on this campaign were largely those of my newspaper chief and mentor, John Fordyce, who

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would sit with his feet on his desk and analyze the situation for me. I throw this in for fear some of my friends will complain that I am too oracular.

The *Hamilton Express*, taking refuge in the sophistry that it is improper for a newspaper to take sides in a primary, was saying nothing. But young Mr. Littledale had talked for some time to Fordyce and others about a surprise he was going to launch during the primary contest; so we wondered if he meant that toward the end the paper was going to be permitted to say something on the issues.

We need not have wondered. His surprise was typical of his methods. It was the addition of four colored pages of comics to the Saturday afternoon edition, accompanied by the announcement that as the grown-ups were busy with politics, the dear little kiddies of Hamilton could turn to the *Express* every Saturday for their amusement and recreation.

Littledale was the first publisher in Hamilton to discover the kiddies and cater to them at the expense of other interests of the paper. We seldom used the word children; children were always kiddies to the *Express*.

Littledale held the theory that the volume of retail-store advertising that the *Express* needed to lift it out of debt was dependent upon circulation composed largely of women readers. Behind this was the conviction that the women of Hamilton did most of the buying. He wanted the paper packed with stories, pictures, articles and serials designed for women and children. He was convinced that women were not only

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not interested in politics but were bored and puzzled by reports dealing with political affairs. His instructions were to reduce all such news to the minimum and to exploit all stories originating in domestic relations.

Littledale's policy toward the children sprang from the opinion that the average home is ruled by its children. Make the children want the *Express* on account of its comics and they will torment their parents into taking it was the idea outlined to us. He insisted that circulation was a matter of women and children.

His theories, borne of his New York origin, seemed correct so far as one could judge by results. Our circulation and advertising were growing steadily. So aggressive was the *Express* that we were worrying the other papers which, in the hands of local ownership, were governed by reticence in dealing with the sides of life the *Express* emphasized.

There was no recourse for the other papers except to be content with smaller profits due to smaller advertising income. They either had to adopt Littledale's system or take second and third places in the city. The advertising manager of the *Express* could tell the advertising managers of the department stores that the *Express* was read by women who controlled all but a small part of the expenditures of the Hamilton families. Littledale pointed out that the magazines with the largest circulations were women's magazines; he said that the newspaper of the future would be a woman's newspaper. Thus we were witnessing a phase of the evolution of American journalism. Comics instead of comment seemed to pay.

## CHAPTER XI

**I**F YOU should hear a professional man, a corporation executive, or a public official refer to his secretary as Miss Crisp you would imagine an efficient, self-contained person in a severe blue or gray suit and a starched blouse, managing office routine with the unemotional dependability of a machine. You would think of her as living in the Y. W. C. A. dormitory and drinking tea at breakfast. Her age would be indefinite and immaterial. I had heard Dan Meredith speak of Miss Crisp; I had heard Mrs. Meredith allude to her; and I had said to myself, "Dan has a smart, capable business woman in his office."

As I sat waiting to see him, soon after my trip to Columbus, I thought it was a good thing that Meredith's personal assistant was a Miss Crisp, for the yellow-haired girl at the typewriter desk across the room belonged to the opposite down-town type. She had the widely spaced, guileless, light-blue eyes of a child, with a petulant, over-full lower lip that suggested the hateful storming of the undisciplined.

Instead of a costume appropriate to business she wore what the department-store advertisements call an afternoon frock, as diminutive and as fragile as possible. She had what must have been one of the first boyishly shingled hair-cuts and she was redolent with

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an exotic, sensuous perfume. This disconcerting assemblage of contradictions, the childlike combined with studied knowingness, was the outpost of Illyria's Secretary of Public Affairs.

The buzzer sounded, and this bit of fluffy down that was resting so lightly on the surface of the state's business told me I was to go in. As I passed her desk she surprised me by looking up and adding, "I've heard Mr. Meredith speak about you often, Mr. Preston."

Her voice was toneless, flat, as if she were deficient in vitality. It was also slightly nasal.

I hesitated. A girl like this might do Dan some harm; evidently she was accustomed to talking to him about things aside from the correspondence and engagements of his position. I said:

"I knew Mr. Meredith in Empire. I've never been in his office before. I expected to see Miss Crisp."

Her carmined lips, their exactly marked edges sharp against the powdered skin, contorted into what was meant for a smile.

"I am Miss Crisp. Everybody thinks it's funny,—my name, I mean. Don't you think Mr. Meredith is wonderful?"

"Marvelous," I muttered, hurrying toward the door to the private office.

You have no idea how startled I was to learn that this trite, cold-blooded child was Dan's secretary. She belonged to the type that works, with as little effort as possible, for the sake of an escape from home and the additional freedom that down-town places afford. She

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was a museum example of the stenographer who always has one eye off her notes. I learned afterward that her given name was Nellie. I found also that the office arrangements suited her. The real work of the department was done in other rooms. She was Meredith's personal typist.

(It is my belief that Nellie Crisp is not to be identified with the unnamed girl mentioned by certain unscrupulous newspapers during Meredith's presidential race as having been assisted by him financially. Meredith's recklessness and stupidity were of the kind to excite pity and not of the reprehensible sort.)

After the customary interchange of platitudes about how we were and how the McHenry-Bostwick fight was going, I said to Meredith:

"I can't help being fascinated by the person outside . . . I was expecting Miss Crisp to be different."

He tipped back in his desk chair and lighted a cigarette.

"I get a lot of fun out of Nellie. She's a bright little thing; takes a lot of details off my hands. And she cheers me up; she's so full of life."

"You are not going in for the younger generation, are you, Dan?"

"No; but, damn it, Jim, all the women I know are so dry and gloomy. Nellie's always ready with a laugh."

"That's all right. But she's between you and the public. You're sure she has enough . . . reserve? She's loyal, I suppose?"



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"Loyal? Say! I'll tell you something funny. There's a woman been coming here to work on me to help her get a job with the state committee,—Fitch, Carolyn Fitch. Well, little Nellie has the idea that Mrs. Fitch is a little too interested in me personally. Get the point? She's spoken about it; laughingly, you know. And day before yesterday what do you suppose happened? I walked out into the other room and there sat Mrs. Fitch. Nellie had told her I was out, thinking she'd go away. She'd been there for over an hour. You should have seen her look at Nellie when she saw me! But Nellie never blinked. She said, 'Why, Mr. Meredith! I thought you were up-stairs with the Governor! You must have come in by the other door.' Carolyn—Mrs. Fitch, I mean—couldn't say a word. I got a big laugh out of that."

When I thought of my promise to Laurel Fife I grew cold. Meredith's deterioration was progressing more rapidly than I had suspected. There was no foundation in reason for a man in his place making himself the familiar of this little hussy who typed his letters. Where were his sense and his self-respect?

It was then that I had one of my moments of rashness that approach insanity. I thought I was having a flash of intuition. Meredith, I decided, was amusing himself with these casual feminine contacts through boredom and weariness. He was just the kind to be made silly by such an extreme instance of the forward post-war girl as this Nellie Crisp. Now was the time, I concluded, to expose him to the curative steadying influence of Laurel Fife.

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Meredith was regarding me with a half-smile, almost as if he were reading my thoughts. His mystifying magnetism persisted. You had to like him even when he was most disappointing.

In such a moment I moved boldly and without taking counsel to bring Laurel Fife and Dan Meredith together. I acted on impulse and opportunity for, like most timid men, I have my flashes of audacity.

Talking politics with Meredith in his office that day, I heard him say that he was going to drive out to his farm to stay over the next week-end. Instantly my plan became a perfected whole.

*The Enchantress*, having played a trial week in Cleveland, had been withdrawn temporarily for some play doctoring. The company had retreated to Toledo. Something was wrong with the play, the owners, author and director could not tell what. Letters from Dixon said the New York presentation might be put off until fall. Charles Carter and Colin Hay were not satisfied. Neither was willing to risk Laurel's reputation by exposing her to the possibility of a failure.

From what Laurel had told me in Columbus I suspected the defect was in the mental state of the star rather than in the play. The author and director were being magnanimous. However, the company was idle, so I saw how the desired meeting could take place.

Laurel and Dixon could come to Hamilton on Friday; on Saturday I would take them to Dan's place. After the interview I would bring them back to return by train to their business in Toledo.

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As men will who plan dangerous encounters, I overlooked some logical contingencies. One of them was the possibility that Mrs. Meredith had overcome her aversion to her husband's rural tendency and would be with him. I did not think of this until the excursion was over.

The journey took place just as I had planned it. Laurel and Dixon responded to my special delivery note by taking the train I specified. I took them to the Great Valley Hotel and, as it was late, left them with instructions to be ready to start in my car next day at noon. I say instructions for, in my anxiety, I went about fretfully, telling them what to do.

Meredith's farm was about the same distance from Hamilton as from his home in Empire, so I thought a start after an early luncheon would time our arrival most happily for all. We ate at eleven and then climbed college fashion into the front seat of my ancient vehicle, an interesting car of obsolete type that I had obtained by trading my sedan. It was such a large and powerful machine that I must have looked an anachronism at the steering wheel. I was its third or fourth owner; in its life the mileage register had gone around once and then had stopped recording.

Laurel might have been going on a shopping trip. She showed not the slightest curiosity about the details of my schedule for her, though I knew she was agitated. Asides from Dixon had let me know that our friend was giving an exhibition of control.

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"But," Dixon had added, "this had to happen. It can't do her any harm, for she couldn't be any further off form. Even if something happens to make her throw up her part it won't matter, for if she goes on as she is she will throw it up anyhow."

Dixon sat between Laurel and me, which was unsafe because she had a disturbing effect on my driving.

"I haven't written to you about those stories," she said, "because I expected to see you. I'm keeping them till we can have a talk. They are about what I thought; especially *Madame Peggy*."

"It's all right for Dixon to stir your ambition," Laurel put in, "but you must resist her efforts to improve you, Jim. You are all right as you are. Dixon has a passion for perfecting people she likes. You've got to grow callouses; mine are very thick."

We passed an old Ford, abandoned, with its rear end in the ditch.

"She is now repressing an impulse to stop and lift that old car on to the road and get it to running again," Laurel added.

Dixon chuckled, and I almost thought she pressed my arm.

"I promise to stop deviling Jim to be a genius if *Madame Peggy* won't go."

After a moment Laurel said in quite another tone, "He is already a genius for being good to a selfish stranger."

I did something to the engine to make it roar and carry on, for I couldn't endure her on this strain, es-

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pecially when I had brought her on this adventure without making certain how we would be received.

At the risk of being accused of resorting to coincidence I must set down that we were delayed twenty-five miles from our objective by a flat tire; for we did have one, an actual mishap and no coincidence. I have carefully stated that my machine was very old and dilapidated; the treads had been worn from all the casings. The antique rims and difficult bolts made the change to the spare take longer than the same operation with a modern car. We were held up about an hour, which really has nothing to do with the case except that we came to the turn-off to Dan's place about half past five instead of at the hour I had fixed in my mind. So, like most coincidences to which people object, this one was not important. Its only bearing on the situation is that while we were at Dan's farm twilight began to draw around us.

We were silent going through the lane between fields and bits of wood that were delicately green in the mild tentative prettiness of spring. The little new leaves on the maples gave a softening blur to the distance and to the house as we went up the hill facing the sky that seemed hung like a bluish curtain behind it. The season had advanced just enough to induce moods. I remember thinking what a pity it was that we were all too worried to yield to the invitation of the consoling scene. It did not, however, force its claim on us but put it forward bashfully as if reminding us that it would wait for our serious affairs. We put it aside regretfully as one

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under compulsion discourages the advances of a shy child.

After I had stopped the car at the edge of the brick terrace we waited a minute as though we were all wondering what we should do next; and then I said I would go and see who was at home, just as if we were out making the rounds of country friends on a Sunday afternoon. At first I was afraid the house was empty for I pressed the bell three or four times before I heard anybody inside. Then somebody came along the passage and the door opened a little, a middle-aged woman, evidently the wife of the tenant, peering out at me.

"I came to see Mr. Meredith," I said. "Please tell him it is Mr. Preston, from Hamilton."

For some time she looked past me at Dixon and Laurel in the car. "I'll see if he's home," she finally grudged me, closing the door and leaving me to wait on the step. She was gone several minutes, and my curiosity and irritation at the delay increased with each one. When at last the door opened again and she told me to come in, I noticed she gave my waiting companions another searching look.

Meredith was standing in the long peaked living-room in which we had eaten our luncheon on that winter day before the fire. The light had begun to fail so the room was shadowy; but I felt at once that it was different. The table on which we had eaten held an earthenware bowl full of jonquils. They attracted my eye at once. Looking at them, I saw that beside the bowl somebody had put down and left a beaded hand-

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bag. It was then I had my first flash of my own foolhardiness.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "Mrs. Meredith is here. I thought she never came."

He returned my inquiring look rather stupidly; then, following my glance back to the table, he said quickly, "No; she's not here. Somebody left that. Have a drink."

At the end of the table was a tray with glasses and the inevitable black bottle of prohibition.

"Not now. May I sit down a minute?"

He pulled a lamp switch. I then saw that the room had been markedly improved. Things were thrown about comfortably. New chairs, cushions, were here and there. I noted a good rug. One of these new radios had been put in, and a phonograph. Meredith had been using his woodland home.

He poured himself a drink. He had been lounging in his shirt-sleeves and now he sat that way, one long leg thrown across the arm of his easy chair, his glass in his hand. His plentiful dark hair was rumpled. He could have stood a shave.

"Dan," I began, "to come right to the point, there is somebody outside in my car you've been wanting to see for a good while."

He did not get it at first.

"You know she is a friend of mine. I happened to be having her and one of her company on a week-end in Hamilton, so I got her to let me bring her past."

I don't know why I should have been trying to ease

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it to him, but I was; and still he did not understand. That made me mad.

"What's the matter with you? Laurel Fife is out there in my machine."

He reached out hurriedly and set his glass down so that it rattled on the board. I noticed he gave a rapid glance toward the balcony off which the chambers opened. I wondered why there was so much looking in this house.

"Jim . . . I'm in no shape."

"I see you're not. You're not in good shape at all."

He was fingering the knot of his tie, which was askew, and rubbing his chin. "I look like hell," he commented. Then he seemed to remember something. "I can't bring her in here."

He reached in the direction of the tray.

"No more of that," I broke in. "You've had plenty."

"Yes," he agreed meekly. "I've had plenty. What am I going to do?"

"Well, you're keeping a lady waiting. You might go out there and say how do you do." I tried to be scornful but the effort was lost.

"I'd have to ask her in and that won't do."

"That's too bad. There are two chaperons . . . not counting your old woman."

"No; it won't do. Funny Laurel Fife should turn up here."

"Listen, Dan; it's a fine spring evening. Walk around by the lake with her. Do anything; only, get yourself together and do your part."

He pondered.



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"I want to see her and I don't want to. She'll make me think of things I've got all settled in my mind."

"Look here, Dan; this is that Atlantic City girl of yours,—haven't you any sense? You need some common politeness."

He got to his feet. "I tell you what," he said. "You go out and take her around the house by the lake. Leave her there and I'll go right out. Is there somebody else, you say?"

"Yes; but no matter. I don't get the way you're acting about bringing them in. You've got a housekeeper here; you ought to offer them something to eat."

He was putting on his coat and squaring his shoulders as if for one of his entrances to a political meeting. "I'll fix that all right. You take her around to the lake. I'll be right out."

That was the best I could do; and I decided it might be best for Laurel. As I went out to the car I was wondering about the unwarranted atmosphere of mystery around Dan's behavior. I had expected him to be excited, but I had not expected him to be queer. There was something behind it.

Laurel looked at me across the door of the car as if I were returning from the scene of an accident in which a friend had been shockingly injured.

"I saw him through the windows when he turned on the lights," she said. "Now that I am here I don't want to go any farther. I'm frightened, Jim."

"He is frightened, too. He doesn't want to meet you,—and he does. He's like you; all mixed up. But here you are and there he is. He's not coming out here;

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he thought of an easier way for you . . . outdoors by the lake." I had to dress that part of it a little.

Very pale and grave, she got out of the car, moving with an effort.

"Walk with me, Jim," she whispered. "I feel so shaky; I don't know whether I can do it or not."

She took my arm and we went slowly around the wing of the house to where the rear lawn, really a piece of woodland, ran down to the beach. As we turned the corner I saw the figure of a man moving toward us among the trees.

"This is your time, Laurel; the one you have been thinking about. I'll go back now."

She gave me a crooked smile, stood away from me as if to test her ability to stand, and took two or three halting steps into the twilight toward the man.

Dixon Latrobe and I walked up and down, not getting far from the car, for both of us had the tragedy of our friend so heavily on our minds that we felt we should be ready to go to her the minute she should reappear.

I began to worry because we had brought nothing to eat. I had had a foolish vision of supper with Dan. Now that it was too late, I knew that we would be starting back hungry, and that we would not even enter Dan's house. I did not know why; I just felt it.

So we just walked. It was full dusk now, and we were preoccupied with what was taking place on the other side of the house.

"There's somebody in there," Dixon observed,

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calling my attention to the living-room that was now fully lighted. A woman or girl was moving about. It was not the housekeeper.

I was, in a sense, Laurel's guardian in this business, so I thought I had a right to cross the terrace to where I could see more clearly. I walked up to the windows and took a look. The visitor was in the act of pouring herself a drink at Dan's tray. Afterward she moved across and picked up the beaded hand-bag from beside the bowl of flowers. From it she took a cigarette-case.

Dixon didn't ask any questions when I returned to her. She is good that way; she seems to know when. She had climbed into the back of the car and was holding open the door for me. When I sat down beside her she snuggled against me and put her head against my shoulder.

"You're awfully nice, Jim," she said.

She may have seen that the discovery of the woman in the house was worrying me and was trying to reassure me. I let her know I was grateful.

"I am awfully glad you love me, Jim," she whispered.

I had never told her I did, but I loved her more for inferring it and for speaking of it so beautifully.

All at once I knew Laurel was coming back. "You'd better come with me to meet her," I told Dixon, so we went toward her side by side.

I could not have imagined a woman could express so much in her gait. She came to us with the slow forced steps an invalid takes on being permitted up from a ravaging disease. There was sorrow in her white face that was lifted to us, but more than that; it was as if

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she were telling herself that she owed us a pretense of bravery. There was despair, and yet that awful patience that seems to dwell in the eyes of a woman who has been hurt beyond remedy but is still mindful of her obligation to her friends.

As we reached her she went to Dixon, who was holding out her arms, and came along painfully between us, asking, though her voice came with an obvious effort, "Did you two children get engaged while I was gone?"

I looked across her lowered head at Dixon.

There was nothing to be said. Somehow Dixon and I knew that Meredith would not follow. "You might let me sit in the back by myself," Laurel almost muttered as we came to the machine. She clutched the door to steady herself.

The evening had fallen chilly, so I wrapped her as well as I could in the robe and Dixon made her pull the collar of her coat up snugly. As I stepped on the starter I knew she was sitting back there looking at those lighted windows.

I drove back to Hamilton as fast as I could, and there was no talk. Occasionally Dixon would glance back to see if she were needed. It was like hurrying to a doctor.

As I drew along the curb at the hotel, Laurel spoke for the first time. "What time do we get out for Toledo?"

"There is a train in an hour and a half."

"See if you can get a drawing-room and then come up for a minute, Jim."

I went up fifteen minutes later. To my surprise,

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Laurel let me in. Dixon was putting things into their bags on the other side of the room.

"I made your reservation," I began, trying to make it easy for Laurel to avoid the major subject.

"I don't want you to go to the station. We are used to taking care of ourselves. I want to say good-by here."

She had taken off her hat, put on another dress, done things to her hair. I was astonished by the return of her normal, serene manner. She embarrassed me by taking both my hands and smiling up at me.

"I am all right," she whispered. "Don't worry."

"I should have let him know; I didn't think."

"No; don't blame yourself. If you had let him know he might have . . . run away."

Her smile faded.

"Jim, who was the girl who was there with him?"

I hesitated.

"I knew she was there," Laurel went on. "He didn't say so; he didn't need to. But I knew why he didn't ask us in. The pitiful . . . cheapness of what he did . . . meeting me in the yard. But no matter! I am all right now!"

Her voice was thin and high. She was not all right.

"Then when we were starting away I saw her sitting in the front room there. I might as well know it all now and get it over.

Dixon went up behind her and put an arm around her.

"You were in there; you saw her through the window. Did you know her?"

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"It was a girl named Crisp,—Nellie Crisp."

"Who is she?"

"She works in his office in the state-house."

"Nellie Crisp." She repeated the name.

I was suddenly in a panic. I had been in the house. Laurel might be thinking I had seen Nellie Crisp, had known of her presence before Laurel went to meet Dan.

"Laurel, I want you to know I didn't know she was there . . ."

"Jim, don't say that. Of course you didn't. You needn't tell me. I want to go now for I shall be better if I am back in my routine. Thank God, I've got one. I am going back to work. I think . . . the Scott Meredith episode is over. But what will become of him? What will a person like that do to him?"

She sat down on the edge of the bed, looking at me piteously. Dixon sat beside her and held out a hand to me.

"Run along, Jim. I'll take care of her. We'll get our train."

But Laurel protested.

"Dixon, you can't do that. Go outside with Jim and say good-by to him properly."

She managed a smile, pushing Dixon away.

So we stood outside the door.

"I'll write," Dixon whispered. "You have done your part beautifully."

The next moment I was standing there alone trying to decide whether or not her lips had brushed mine just before she vanished.

## CHAPTER XII

**H**UMILIATED by the disastrous result of my impetuous planning, filled with shame and remorse at having failed to make certain of finding Meredith alone at the farm, I detested the inevitable rationalizing thoughts that began to creep into my mind in two or three days. For example this:

"Laurel knows now that this fellow is no good. She knows what nobody could have explained to her. She will stop thinking about him. She ought to be cured of what has been ailing her. She ought to see Colin Hay in a different light; perhaps she will marry him. This shock may have been what she needed."

I dislike people who are always seeing the silver lining; I have always been a rather sad young man, preferring honest hopelessness. Yet my mind kept straying toward ideas improving the new situation.

These were accompanied by a sense of relief about my own relationship to Meredith. I was discharged from further obligation to him. He was too much for me. I am not so moral that the general idea of a week-end companion is repugnant. I happen to be temperamentally unfitted for such excursions myself; I have never been able to take myself seriously enough. But in thinking about Dan's case I tried to imagine myself belonging among the physically confident and the

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mentally solemn who arrange such inconvenient episodes at such great cost; and in doing so I found myself angry with him chiefly for holding himself so cheap and for being so gross and stupid. Nobody but a fool would put himself into the hands of Nellie Crisp. Dan simply lacked all artistry and proportion.

If the other woman who had shown some interest in him had been found there, this Carolyn Fitch, the situation would still have been an affront to Dan's friends. There might, however, have been extenuation in that she was at least a mature woman, not a weedy girl.

Consider for a moment our Mrs. Fitch. The men building an organization to bring in the woman vote when it should be needed said you had to give Mrs. Fitch credit—she was clever. "A clever little woman," they said. I would not have been surprised if Meredith had been captured for the moment by Mrs. Fitch. She was that unusual combination of feminine body and masculine mind that pleases men who are satisfied with broad effects.

If one were writing this account as a novel one would have to allude to her origins in detail, but as this informal commentary on the life of our great man is not intended to be one of those thick cradle-to-the-grave narratives that are so much admired by persons who have never read them, I may say of Mrs. Fitch's presence in the Illyrian scene simply that she had been discovered in the village of Albion by Governor Spencer. She had arranged and presided over a Spencer campaign meeting for women so acceptably that he had



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suggested that she come up to Hamilton, thinking to find a place for her in state headquarters. So she had come, leaving her husband at home.

Spencer's professed attitude toward her was benevolently paternal. He liked to do good deeds for worthy young women. He did many praiseworthy acts for young women, none of whom was cross-eyed or lame. All his life, and especially in his old age, he was noted for assisting girls. Two of these showed surprising ingratitude, coming forward with outrageous claims on his estate after he had passed away. Of course, they were properly put down.

I had been told by Marberry how the young Mr. Fitch had been consoled by the Republican powers with the appointment as postmaster of Albion. My impression from this conversation was that Mrs. Fitch welcomed the opportunity of leaving him in such a convenient and respectable manner.

Although she had been in Hamilton a year the promised connection had not been made. Senator Albree, without whose sanction she could not be appointed, was not certain that she would do, so her case was still pending when my attention was directed to her. She had a small income from her father, enough to make her independent of the bridegroom of her lost youth and permit her to seek her fortune among the politicians.

The position Mrs. Fitch desired would make her the frequent and privileged associate of the men she found congenial,—free-spending, free-drinking fellows of

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from forty to sixty, preferably office-holders or members of the inner councils. She liked to drink, smoke and talk like a man,—this, of course, in the side world of hotel rooms and apartments removed from the women of the cities and towns to whom she would be, if appointed, the paid political prophetess.

Senator Albree knew Mrs. Fitch would be a valuable aide, but nobody knew better than he the dangers of turning a thoroughly emancipated woman of unfixed status loose among the good wives of the solid citizenry.

He had not vetoed nor O.K.'d Mrs. Fitch. He was considering her application. Marberry thought that Albree was suspicious of Governor Spencer's fatherly patronage of the needy fair.

Mrs. Fitch had been a true brunette once, about 1912 or 1913. In her thirties the black had become rusty. The girl who had been merely giddy with flounces and ribbons had turned into a flashy, rather hard-eyed woman. She was shrill, insistent, contradictory; but even with these qualities against her she still showed unmistakable power over other women. This may have been because they envied her complete freedom, her defiance of feminine restraint, and admired secretly the determination with which she went toward her purposes, public and private.

Though the organization needed an energetic woman on the state staff, the Fitch appointment wavered and waited. Perhaps the men at state headquarters wanted to be sure they were not getting one such as had been attached in a minor capacity some years

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earlier—before the war—and who had been discovered by some of them to be so affectionate that she caused embarrassments even in such a pagan circle. The men this now vanished lady had naturally considered her own to visit herself upon were by nature and practise cautious in their ponderous love-making. They went by the rule that the informal engagements suggested by the presence of their amorous co-worker were safe only when man appointed the times and the seasons. Women were too unexpected.

Although Meredith knew there was no conquest, no distinction, in the favor of Carolyn Fitch, he might have been compelled to tolerate her until he could see whether she was to have a position of power. He was not compelled to tolerate his office girl. With depressing needlessness he had invited ruin on the happiness of his wife, Laurel and himself. There was something perverse about his apparent week-end sojourn with Nellie Crisp.

Three or four days after the trip to Meredith's farm, John Fordyce strolled into my little room in the *Express* building, smiling reflectively and cocking his Wheeling stogie at the ceiling. Pushing from a chair a pile of old newspapers in which I had been hunting safe editorial subjects, he sat down and looked at me musingly, as if enjoying some secret thought at my expense.

"This friend of yours—Meredith," he began. "We're covering up a mighty good news story about him. His

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wife filed suit for divorce in Empire the other day."

I must have looked like an idiot, for his smile became a chuckle. I know I didn't speak. All I could do was grope frantically for a cigarette.

"Here's one," Fordyce said. "She filed it and then withdrew it the same day."

"Not going through with it?"

"No; that's what makes it a good story; so good we can't print it. But they've got the other papers sewed up too."

"Who's they?"

"Oh, just people; forces. Of course, there's no suit in the record and only a paper that was off Meredith would run the story now."

I waited for him to go on.

"Our correspondent in Empire got the tip from a friend who works in the county clerk's office. It seems that Mrs. Meredith's lawyer filed the complaint, but it wasn't entered in the books in the ordinary course of business. That was intentional, of course. The court clerk was told to leave it out so the papers wouldn't get it. In fact, the complaint and affidavit were missing from the files when our man went to look for them after being tipped off. Her lawyer had them. Jackson, our man, went to the mat with him."

"I didn't know they could take the records like that."

"They can't, but this fellow did. He said it was against public policy for the action to be known. But Jackson knew his rights. He went to the judge and de-

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manded an order to see the complaint; said he would print the disappearance in the paper."

That stirred me. I hadn't heard of a good reporter like that for some time.

"The judge was alarmed, naturally. He told him to come back in an hour; and when Jackson went back he was told the suit had been withdrawn. Later he learned that the judge had called in Benny Hightower and Seneca Giles. They got hold of Overton, Mrs. Meredith's father, and put the work on him. They told him it would be a bad thing for the party to have Dan sued for divorce, and he'd have to make his daughter call it off. Then the telephones began to work and before evening we had agreed not to print. Technically, of course, there was no story."

"There was certainly a story in impounding the records."

"My boy, won't you ever learn? What good does it do to elect a clerk of the courts if he won't help you out when you need him? This clerk is a member of the gang. He knows that if he wants another term he'd better play ball. He could forget to make the entry; there's no law against a poor memory."

"I'd have bet anything Mrs. Meredith would never have done that. She must have changed a lot."

"You know she's had provocation."

"In a general way."

"General way hell! What about Carolyn Fitch?"

"I happen to know you're wrong about that. It isn't Mrs. Fitch. It's somebody else."

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"He's getting credit for spending a lot of time with Carolyn."

"He's a bigger fool than that. I can't tell you the girl's name."

"What do you make of him?"

"I wish I knew. Before this I'd seen him taking refuge in some pretty common things. I've gone the rounds of the bootleg places with him. You remember where we found him in Chicago, the day after Harding was nominated. I've always supposed he was just getting away from himself as a fellow will who has no imagination. But this other thing,—there is no excuse for it. He could do so much better. You hate to see a man degrade himself without cause. But tell me this: Why is everybody so anxious to prop him up?"

"He's available. He's trained and ready. The Republicans can stick him in any time they want to take over an office."

"I wish they had let Mrs. Meredith's divorce suit go through. It isn't a real marriage. She had a right to her chance, and so has he. Just think: If she'd disgrace him sufficiently by the divorce action to make him undesirable as a candidate in the future it might be the making of him,—forcing him out of this life."

"A good thought, my boy, but visionary. It assumes that 'this life,' as you call it, is not praiseworthy. This kinship with Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson,—where is your patriotism?"

Fordyce was laughing at me, as he often did when I needed to be saved from my tendency to speculate. To

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cover my embarrassment under his gentle ridicule I asked him how the senatorial fight looked.

"I dislike to prophesy, but I think Bostwick is going to win."

"Are you serious?"

"I am. Everything is against him but one thing; and that thing is going to nominate him unless something happens."

"What's that?"

"The farmer vote. The farmers are broke; lots of them have been ruined in the last year in ways they can't understand. The industries and wage earners in the cities are in good shape by comparison. On account of the drop in farm prices, the decline of land values and the collapse of the country banks, the farmers are ready to swat something. They'll swat McHenry, not because they have anything against him but because he happens to be in. The organization can control anybody but a farmer. He spends a lot of time alone and does a lot of thinking. He gets mad, madder than a city wage slave ever gets. He gets mad and then stubborn and votes for the other fellow. He has always done it and he always will. The only kind of revolution this country can have is a revolution of the farmers. It is the only kind it ever has had. Another thing, the farmers liked Roosevelt because he gave big business and rich people hell once in a while. Bostwick was Roosevelt's friend. The farmers like him on that account. He will be nominated or I don't know anything about politics."

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"I hope you're right; I like Bostwick."

"Well, get me right. I don't say he'll be elected in the fall. That's something else. I'm saying he will be nominated."

Fordyce's story of Mrs. Meredith's sudden move toward a divorce compelled me to go to the state-house that day. One question that was in my mind was answered in his reception-room, for Nellie Crisp was not there. A serious-looking woman in shell-rim spectacles was at the desk.

Dan was sitting behind a great table in the high gloomy room that was his office. He looked out of place; more like a prosperous young broker than a state officer. The room was in key with the public building architecture of the eighties, having doorways ten feet high and narrow windows from floor to ceiling. It was utterly cheerless. It seemed that pompous whiskered men in Prince Alberts should have been standing around.

He laid aside the document he was reading, but he did not invite me to sit down. I said:

"I thought I ought to come and tell you that I know why you had to meet Laurel Fife outdoors the other evening. Our paper has the story of your wife's divorce action, though it isn't publishing it. You're not taking very good care of yourself."

He locked his long fingers behind his head and smiled.

"You're sore, aren't you, Jim?"



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"Why not? What's the use pretending?"

"You're right; there's no use. I'm not denying anything to you. I drove Nellie Crisp out there. She's good company. What I had in mind was to run her over for the afternoon and evening and bring her back. But she took a traveling bag."

"You don't need to tell me."

"Well, I'm going to tell you anyhow. When you brought Laurel to see me, Nellie got furious. When I went back into the house she was in a rage. She accused me of getting my engagements mixed; asked me who my friend was. She was so mad she wouldn't stay. She made me drive her to the interurban. She came back to Hamilton that night."

He had pictured himself being upbraided by a jealous and probably slightly drunken Nellie Crisp as if the incident were without significance. He attached importance, however, to something else, saying:

"So, technically, I am not guilty. She took her traveling bag and went. You notice she isn't here any more. I told her she was through."

He got up and strolled to the window, standing there looking down into the street.

"What about you and Laurel?"

"That's all over. She must have told you."

"Certainly not."

"Well, that was pretty bad. You see, I had had some drinks, and I wasn't quite myself; and somehow I had it in my head that she would be more or less like other women by this time. She's old-fashioned; not what

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you'd expect in an actress. Anyhow, I frightened her, or something."

That speech was made as he stood with his back toward me.

"I know my approach was bad. After it was too late I saw my mistake. I was too abrupt."

The terrible thing broke on me suddenly.

"You don't mean you . . ."

He turned and regarded me dully.

"Don't get excited. Let me tell you what happened. When she came up to me under the trees I caught her and held her in my arms and kissed her. Honest, Jim, I thought that was the thing to do. But I went on kissing her and wouldn't let her go and wouldn't let her say anything. I suppose I was rough. Anyhow, she was just limp and dead feeling in my arms; and when I let her go she just stood away from me holding her mouth and looking at me in a queer sort of way. I thought she was going to run, but she must have felt weak, for she had to sit down on the root of a tree. For a long time she couldn't get up. I just stood there. I asked her if she'd like me to go in and get her a drink of liquor. She shook her head and tried to get up. When she could stand she did a funny thing,—just put out her hand and touched mine and touched my face and seemed to be trying to smile. I couldn't hear her very well, but I thought she said, 'Poor boy, poor boy,' like that. Then she went around the house, and you took her away."

"But Dan . . ."

"Don't stop me. Nellie went home. I told you that.

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But that's not all. I'd just got back from the interurban stop in my machine when up drove Alice and her father. At half past twelve."

He came back to the table then and dropped into his chair.

"They were looking for Nellie . . . it seems the poor simpleton had bragged to Carolyn Fitch that she was going on a trip with me. And somebody—it wasn't Mrs. Fitch, but some man—called old man Overton on the long distance in Empire. So you see how that was. Alice was visiting at home."

I didn't speak when he paused; I was too amazed by his disclosure.

"Of course, Nellie was gone, and it wouldn't have been hard to make them think everything was all right. But Nellie had forgotten her hand-bag. It was lying there on the table. Overton found it."

He astonished me next by laughing.

"The funny part of it all is that I wasn't trying to put anything over. All I had in mind was that Nellie and I'd drive out, have a few drinks, eat our dinner, play some records, and maybe dance a little bit. . . . Of course nobody would believe that. But look what I get as a result!"

After a while he said:

"Don't think that I don't know what I've done to Laurel Fife, for I do. I have probably committed suicide so far as she is concerned. I was violent; I shocked her. I admit it all. She may have thought I was drunk. But I was all mixed up. The highballs, and being with

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other kinds of women so long,—I guess I've lost the ability to discriminate, Jim."

That last comment, about losing the ability to discriminate, remained with me for years after I had passed out of Meredith's circle. Starting to go, I think I said something like this:

"You should have recalled the time you and she were together in Atlantic City. You weren't rough then. That recollection should have steadied you."

"I meant to be like old times when I went out . . . but I couldn't."

"That's what your associations have done to you."

"My associations aren't so bad."

"Haven't you just admitted that they've blunted you?"

"I wouldn't go that far. If I'm blunted maybe I've done it myself."

But he had imposed on Laurel Fife's visit his own misshapen ideas about sex, the delusions of a coarsened nature. That was the penalty he was paying for his choice made years before when those three old men of Empire had intercepted his course. His tragedy was that he had become incapable of receiving what Laurel had come to him offering. He had been undone by the tendencies he had nursed and encouraged. The original sensitiveness was gone.

"What about you and Alice in the future?"

"Oh, Alice and I will be all right. She's my wife, you see. We'll stay together. She will listen to reason. Her father is glad to cooperate for the good of the party.

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She will do as he says. There will be no divorce. Of course, she applied for it; naturally she was upset."

"Dan," I said quickly, "why not take the divorce? In the end I think you'd be doing Alice a kindness. She isn't fitted for your life. And, free, you could go somewhere else and begin all over. You could redeem yourself with Laurel. She has always loved you. Her influence would straighten out your life. It isn't too late. Why don't you arrange the divorce and make a fresh start?"

He looked at me in surprise tinged with anger.

"Fresh start? What are you talking about? I'm going to the United States Senate if things break right. What do I want to begin over for? Show me a man of my age with any better future. I can't afford a divorce. Things have got to be kept looking right. Some day, when nothing can hurt me, I'll straighten things out. But I don't get you about beginning over again. You talk as if I was ruined!"

The second week in June an amazing thing happened,—amazing to everybody but Fordyce and Marberry. Theodore Bostwick was nominated for the Senate. In the primary he lost the cities but carried the farms. It was as Fordyce had said,—the farmers voted their indignation. Whoever was in was doomed to lose. The docile city people, men and women dependent on factories and stores for wages, had been told by the newspapers and campaign speakers how to vote for the safety of their bread and butter. As usual, they were

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afraid to vote to disturb the existing order or threaten the continuity of their pay envelopes. But the farmers were quite different. They were against the existing order for under it they had come to grief. Having nothing to lose by a change and feeling the urge to register a vicious protest against their poverty, they voted for Bostwick; and the size of the vote indicated they would elect him in November.

## CHAPTER XIII

HAVING been born and reared in Pennsylvania I had only a vague impression of what Democrats were like. When I thought of a politician I thought of a Republican. This was not an unnatural state of mind for any young man in 1922. Working for Republican newspapers during the uneasy years of Wilson, I had gathered from my associations that the ruling Democrats of that period were not representative, but a special group that had come in accidentally. The Republicans never admitted that Wilson had carried the country but referred to him as a minority president who was not even typical of the membership of his own party. They spread this opinion of Wilson earnestly and systematically.

Another reason for my ignorance of Democrats, in addition to their absence from office in Pennsylvania and Illyria, was the Republicans' way of making a full-time business of politics. They had the success habit, which impressed onlookers with the comparative futility of belonging to any other party. Since the fifties, except for the Cleveland and Wilson interludes, Republicans had had charge of national organization and patronage. They distributed the salaried positions, the contracts, the legal advertising. It paid to be a Republican.

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The Republicans did not count the intermissions of Cleveland and Wilson, for they could explain them and saw no omen of their repetition. The effect of Wilson's control of the Democratic party had been to leave it disorganized, without vitality, decision or confidence.

The confusion of Baltimore in 1912 which had produced Wilson had persisted in an aggravated form in 1920 to produce Cox. Two years later the Republicans began to see they would have nothing to fear in 1924. I recall that Fordyce told me about this time that the test of the Republicans, now they were in again, would be whether they could resist capitalizing their power for private gain. He pointed out that so far the Republicans had been unable to prove that the Democrats, with all the liberties and opportunities of the war, had committed the wholesale thefts that usually take place under the protection of such an emergency. If the Republicans could do as well during reconstruction they would have cause for satisfaction.

What had kept the Democrats from taking power except under conditions such as those of 1912 may have been their lack of ability to compromise in the Republican fashion. Each faction was too loyal to its own convictions. It was true that the Republicans eliminated their own strong candidates in the conventions, but with them the practise was deliberate strategy while with the Democrats it was due to an inherent defect that invited division. The Republicans never let their battles get to the floor of the convention if they could prevent it. The Democrats, with their faith in



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the right of all men to express themselves, and their two-thirds rule, made their conflicts a public spectacle, showing themselves too frequently a divided party.

Republican convention speeches seldom meant anything; those of the Democrats usually meant too much and nearly always hurt—not the enemy but important members of their own forces. Ever since Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech in 1896 the Democrats had been cursed with an Egyptian plague of oratory in conventions where grudges were satisfied and old scores paid off. It was no wonder the newspaper men did not think of Democrats as they thought of Republicans, the latter having the justification of success.

Those were strange years, the three that lay between the retirement of the war administration and the beginning of the great disillusionment that was to be traced in oil. They were the years of the philosophy of success, when the younger men were being taught by implication and example that a man's chief duty was to come by large amounts of money. Ways of getting money were not to be scrutinized; the main thing was to get it. That is probably why there was so little indignant reaction to the first disclosures of cynicism in high places. Idealism was definitely out of fashion, so much so that some men seemed anxious to have it forgotten that they had acted and spoken unselfishly during the war. The aversion to all pre-armistice thinking and conduct was constructive and wilful. The public state of mind invited exploitation.

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Having little knowledge of Democrats, I was compelled to learn something immediately of Horace P. Smith, known as Steelyard, who was the Democratic nominee as Bostwick's opponent. This young man, a Wilson Democrat, had been called Steelyard after his father. Once when the elder, now dead, had been running for governor, his press-agent had brought out that the nominee's grandfather had owned the only pair of scales in four counties and had done the weighing for the countryside. A newspaper paragrapher had promptly christened the old gentleman Steelyard. This nickname carried over to the son, a Hamilton lawyer of about forty at this time.

Steelyard the present betrayed the tendency toward the picturesque that so often marks modern disciples of Thomas Jefferson. Informal in his business dress, with a flair for the vagabond note in his soft felt hats, he usually let a lock of reddish hair fall carelessly across his high, narrow forehead. The scarf caught under the attached collar of his shirt was apt to be pulled aside or wanting to be secured beneath his waistcoat, which might not be fully buttoned. Almost studiously careless in the daytime, Steelyard was formal to courtliness in his evening clothes, preferring a black stock to a necktie and favoring a wide velvet collar for his dress coat. He liked a broad ribbon for his heavy-framed nose-glasses, and he was one of the few young men in Hamilton who carried a stick.

Like most Democratic lawyers I have known, Smith was well informed. He knew ancient, medieval and

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modern history; he had an accurate knowledge of music and painting; he was a lover of essays and poetry, both of which he wrote for recreation. He spoke French and Italian. He was passionate and partisan, volatile and extreme, a devoted and belligerent champion of Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations, therefore just the kind of nominee the Republicans would have chosen for their opposition had they been sincere in trying to elect Theodore Bostwick. A League advocate made an easy target for those who knew how to utilize to their advantage the prevalent aversion.

One defect as a practical politician Smith shared with some other prominent Democrats. He knew too much about the past and dwelt on it at the risk of present advantage. I have noticed that more Democrats than Republicans have the archeological mind. More Democrats than Republicans write about the past. They seem to be better historians, and, because they prefer discussing history to making it, they are the more easily worsted by the more realistic Republicans.

Steelyard was for ever telling of Jefferson's scholarship, statesmanship and versatility. He knew more about the architecture of Monticello than about the interior of the Illyria state-house. He could describe and account for the defeat of Samuel J. Tilden when the average Republican did not even know who Tilden was. He was an authority on the intimacies of the Tilden-Hayes recount but was extremely vague about the requirements of the Illyria primary law, of which the Republicans were past masters.

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Smith was a gentleman and a scholar who had been put up by the Democrats because they had no hope of winning the seat. As I grew to know him I saw he would make an engaging, thoroughgoing senator who would take his committee duties seriously, organize and deliver logical and telling speeches, and vote conscientiously on every bill. He would not, probably, take much interest in organization affairs back home. He was what the framers of the Constitution had in mind when they set up the Senate but not what the party officers of his own state had in mind when they thought of that august body.

The surprising victory of Bostwick in the Republican primary was interpreted by the people as an assurance of his triumph in the November election. Steelyard Smith looked easy for the clean-cut, aggressive, likable and admittedly capable Bostwick. Men were heard saying to one another that Bostwick's nomination was a good thing for the party, the state and the nation. The nominee was offering his party an opportunity. What the Senate needed, they said, was a few more Bostwicks.

Although the Republican state organization had opposed Bostwick in the primary, I supposed the leaders would be forced by his victory to suppress their hostility and make his election a party responsibility. What was really happening gave me my most disillusioning glimpse of practical politics, for I soon discovered that the leaders were not only not behind Bostwick but were actually against him. Masking their true motives be-

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hind plausible professions of concern for him, they were hoping for his defeat and his permanent elimination from the state situation.

While the people in the streets were saying Bostwick could not lose, the men in the hotel rooms, law offices and other conference places were saying he could not win. They were sorry, but it was, they said, Bostwick's own fault.

I knew Bostwick was an individualist, with confidence in his own powers and in the soundness of his own beliefs, but these I had come to respect as marks of a superior personality. To be told now by those known to be influential that he was doomed because he was autocratic and intolerant was a baffling check to my reasoning. His virtues had suddenly become faults. And I was astonished when I was told that his attitude was fatal because it would not permit him to make terms with the officers of the Ku Klux Klan.

Republicans like Senator Albree, Governor Spencer and the state chairman professed to be sorry for Theodore. He was a gifted fellow and would make a good senator, but by refusing to treat with representatives of a hundred thousand voters he was carrying self-reliance too far. He was hurting his party. They regretted the situation, but what could they do? The dictator of the Klan, going to Bostwick and giving him a chance to be good, had met a rebuff. Bostwick, in short, had told him to go to hell.

Spencer mourned over Bostwick when I met him in the lobby of the Great Valley.

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"He wants to campaign on the issues! He wants to go out and discuss national affairs! He won't talk to Dickerson, who is running the Klan and can deliver the Klan vote. He says that if he can't go to the Senate unfettered he won't go at all! That settles it; he won't go. We can't do anything with him. The rest of us, Senator Albree and the others, don't believe in the Klan, but a candidate has got to take votes where he finds them."

When I told Fordyce what the Governor had said he nodded in assent.

"Spencer has it right. It has gone farther than that. When Bostwick refused to make promises to the Klan, somebody suddenly recalled an old magazine article he had written back in 1914. It was in praise of German efficiency; perfectly harmless and all right then, when so many were doing the same thing and when it was good politics to have something to say on European matters. But somebody is having it reprinted now in leaflets to be broadcast through the state to prove that Bostwick was pro-German. The hundred per cent. Americans will never vote for him; the Klan leaders will slate for Steelyard. The fellow who found that old article and who suggested using it in the campaign is a Republican in good standing. Bostwick is going to be licked, not by the Democrats but by his own party. They want to get rid of him. That's the issue this year."

The Republicans now discovered also that their nominee was unsatisfactory to the ardent prohibition-

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ists. Bostwick was an abstainer, one of the few political figures who did not drink. But he had always believed that the regulation of drinking should be done by the states so that one group could not impose its will on the nation. His position was simple, clear and sincere. There was no doubt that he was a better man for the prohibitionists because of his honesty than some of the professional political bone-dry fanatics. But he saw no reason for changing his long held conviction for the sake of dry support. If he had tiddled privately and outwardly had proclaimed himself a believer in the Eighteenth Amendment he might have made himself acceptable.

I heard some of our best bottle passers deploring Bostwick's stand on prohibition. Their view seemed to be that a party victory was going to be sacrificed to Bostwick's peculiarities. Looking with satisfaction toward his impending defeat they wanted to make certain that the blame would rest solely on the candidate.

Some said it was too bad Bostwick was so ambitious. They suggested that he was thinking not of the Senate Chamber but of the White House. The voters might decide it was safer to check him. I wondered who would warn them of their danger. Finally I was forced to the truth that Fordyce was trying to make me see. The Old Guard was in power. It would rather lose the seat in the Senate than see it filled by a man who did not belong.

As if the contradictions of politics were not enough

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to confuse and excite me, the fortunes of Laurel Fife's new play added to the necessity of making over my opinions.

I had been certain Laurel would not be able to go on for a long time after her meeting with Dan Meredith, but from the day she rejoined the company *The Enchantress* began to change. From the mere form of a play, in which the author and the director could find no life and which they were afraid to put before a sophisticated audience, it had turned into the work Carter had had in his mind when he had written it and which Colin Hay had recognized in the script. Everything that they had felt was there began to appear as Laurel, as if she had suddenly thrown off an illness, brought the essential part to life and pulled the thing together.

In two weeks they had sent for the owners to come and see the result. They were so sure of what they saw that they decided to chance a late spring opening in New York. Their judgment was supported by the event. *The Enchantress* was now sold out for weeks and was certain to run through the summer and fall and into the next season.

Dixon had sent me clippings,—a varied and illuminating exhibit. Robert C. Benchley told in *Life* of going to scoff at a play labeled *The Enchantress* and remaining to praise, recanting his former edict, delivered at the opening of *Nightfall*, that Laurel Fife was not much of an actress. John Corbin wrote two columns in the *Sunday Times*. Heywood Broun's comments provoked a dispute, with the Rev. Dr. John Roach Straton lead-



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ing the opposition. Franklin P. Adams noticed Laurel's performance in two paragraphs and one of his last lines in *The Conning Tower*. George Jean Nathan, while discerning the origins of the play in one he had seen done by a stock company in Berlin, ended his article by admitting it was good, with the acting comparing favorably with that of the Germans. O. O. McIntyre wrote of seeing Laurel passing in her car. Three Brooklyn ministers preached sermons about *The Enchantress*, quotable excerpts appearing in the advertising. It was the kind of press and public reception that means a line at the ticket window. Companies for Chicago and London were being discussed, Grace George being mentioned for Laurel's part in one of them.

I had one brief message from Laurel soon after the New York opening. She wrote:

"You know that when I left you in Hamilton I didn't expect to be able to go on with this or anything else. All I could do was try, not for myself, for I didn't care, but on Charlie and Colin's account. They seem satisfied. The people like it and we've settled down for a year at least. I am not myself, but I'm at least different from what I was before. I was lifeless, but I'm not now. I am grateful, for the sake of my friends, though I don't comprehend it."

Dixon had been more explicit:

"You haven't seen this play, but it demands a woman who can blaze with scorn and bitterness, a woman almost savage in the big moments. Laurel had never

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quite reached it; could never quite put it across. Now she has run away with the thing. There is no play, really; just Laurel—the new one, one the people never knew, but one the reviewers now say they had been expecting when she should find a play big enough.”

I had passed into a new stage. What had come to be understood between Dixon and me had made me different. Instead of watching my cynical political friends with the amused indifference that was the favored pose of the times for men of my age, I was growing restless over what I saw. Not that I could do anything: none of the newspaper men could. It wasn't that the publishers were parts of the game but that journalism, in becoming a business, had in marked instances defaulted as a civic agency. Community boosting had reached its flood-tide; for a newspaper to recognize specific iniquity was bad advertising.

Too many owners and business managers had made the mistake of tying their hands with memberships in business men's luncheon clubs, members of which told one another habitually that Hamilton was the best city God ever made and that Illyria was the greatest state in the Union. It was hard for publishers to go from such meetings and sanction news stories and editorials that would imply that if God had ever guided the affairs of Illyria He had temporarily withdrawn.

The low state of public affairs was due partly to the carry-over of herd-thinking from the war period. What speakers told audiences was accepted as true by men too busy making up for time lost in the war to analyze

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questions. Besides, the publication of Sinclair Lewis's novels had made it difficult for any newspapers so disposed to combat the herd mind without seeming to approve Lewis's conclusions. To do so would have been to advertise that they recognized the originals of George Babbitt and the conditions held up to scorn in *Main Street*. The merchants, realtors, small lawyers, minor physicians, petty manufacturers and lesser corporation officers had denounced Lewis. That settled it. Any newspaper owners and managers who had become business men themselves were forced to accept the mass reactions of the civic luncheon clubs. Whatever sound opinion that might have been written and expressed by the journalists who were marking time in various offices was suspended. While the Rotary and Kiwanis stood and sang *My Country 'Tis of Thee* above their head lettuce salad with Thousand Island dressing, the politicians were stealing the state.

Fordyce had pointed out to me that politicians were usually successful because they were realists while the business men were usually sentimentalists.

"And with the publishers and editors turning into joiners, you can't expect anything," he added. "For the good of the country there ought to be a law prohibiting a newspaper editor from joining any organization."

He was a strange person, this Fordyce. Though he and I were office intimates, I knew nothing of his history or his private life. For a long time I had wondered why a man of his mentality was content to go along

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year after year filling space with meaningless words under conditions that must have been almost intolerable. A few weeks before the senatorial election I was given an illuminating view of his reasons that thrilled me, coming when it did and in connection with my own affairs.

Meredith, who was staying in Empire the better to do his preelection work in the counties where he was best known, had asked me to come over for a day as he had a proposal that he thought would interest me. I saw him in his home on Madison Boulevard, where I was the solitary guest at dinner of him and his wife. Afterward, in that stiff little up-stairs room in which he had learned of my acquaintance with Laurel Fife, he told me what he had in mind.

"We need a young fellow for state headquarters, somebody who can write and who knows something about politics. We send out stuff to the papers that belong to the Republican Editorial Association—oh, stories that will do the party good and help elect the ticket, or the part of the ticket we want elected. You'd have to write editorials, too, and send them out to the papers that don't have editorial writers. It's a steady job; we keep headquarters open between campaigns. You'd live right there at the Great Valley and do your work there. We'd give you a hundred a week. That isn't all you'd make; there'd be speeches you could write for candidates and special jobs that would bring in something. One fellow who had it a while back used to make fifteen thousand a year. The candidates were

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dumber than usual so he got a lot of speeches to do and stuff to look up in the library. Two or three fellows are after it, but I can get it for you."

He was stretched in a chair, smoking a long cigar, looking comfortable and benevolent. I could scarcely believe this was the same man who had been so agitated two years before in the same room. I thought of the time he and I had driven into the country to see the sun come up and of how he had spoken so bitterly of taking a false start in life. He had the judicial calm of a man whose course is fixed.

I knew what he was talking about. I had seen the political news service from Republican headquarters and the ready-to-print editorials, and I had understood that the writer of this material could ask big prices from candidates for literary help. I could see how such a writer could have a fifteen-thousand-dollar income in addition to an easy residence at the hotel. It wasn't a bad chance for a man of my age.

"I'd like to see you in there," Dan added. "It would be a damned sight easier for me when I was after something. You don't have to believe the stuff you write; all you have to do is write it."

I think I jumped. That was the way it was on the *Express*. I didn't have to believe what I wrote; all I had to do was write it. His laconic phrase had made me see that this job in state headquarters would be like the one I had but better paid.

"You'll never get anywhere on the *Express*," he was going on. "You're in the wrong end of the business to

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make any money. If you were in the advertising department, on the selling end, you could make them see what you're worth."

His attitude was true to the day. He thought of journalism simply as a form of business, computing the value of a position strictly in money.

"Up-stairs you fellows are just spenders. The owners carry you in their minds as liabilities. You come over to headquarters and we'll put you on Easy Street in five years. We'll make a big man of you in the state, if you get into politics on your own account."

That was, in effect, what the three old men had said to him in Atlantic City, but the parallel would not occur to him. The operations of his associations on his nature were almost complete.

"Say you make ten thousand. You live on five and some of us will put the other five into something good. Why, just this year a few of us went into a little asphalt company down-state. It sells to the State Highway Commission. We'll make forty, fifty thousand for ourselves next year."

"Isn't that illegal for you? You're a state official."

"Hell! Nobody knows it. It's all right. We give the state a fair price. There are a lot of things you'd get into as a matter of course if you were in the right position to take advantage of them."

"I'd like to think it over for a day or two."

"All right; come over to my office on Tuesday. I'll be back in Hamilton by then. You know I like you, Jim; I want to see you get along."

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He had acquired the professional paternal manner of the politician.

"You are getting along, aren't you, Dan?"

"You bet I am. I'm getting along fine." He leaned toward me and put a hand on my knee. "Alice is doing better than she was. You know we had a little trouble a while back. Well, after that she seemed to want to turn in and be a good fellow; you know, meeting my friends, and all that. She'll take her highball now right along with the rest."

He sat back, smiling at me, as if he had whispered the secret of a personal triumph.

"She's even dropped a lot of her friends here in Empire. Down at the capital so much, she has a good excuse. That makes it better for me. I like a more liberal crowd."

This explained Mrs. Meredith's manner at the dinner table. I had been puzzled by her talk, which had been about the coming election, full of inept comments and childlike mistakes. She had given the impression of a wife trying to do her duty, which is always painful. I was reminded by recalling her talk to ask Dan what he thought of the election.

"Looks bad for Bostwick. That stuff he wrote about the Germans that time has got the Klan against him. And he's not right with the drys. We're going to have a hard time putting him across; maybe we can't do it."

He was speaking so earnestly that I was not certain for a moment that he was against Bostwick.

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"Dan," I said, "don't try to fool me. You're off of Bostwick like the rest of your crowd."

But he did not change countenance.

"Theodore's a rotten candidate. He doesn't give the organization any help. He's defeating himself."

"With the assistance of his own party organization."

"Where did you get that?"

"Say, Dan, if you want me to come over and work at state headquarters you're making a bad start. You'd have to be on the up-and-up about all these political deals. That's the only way I'd consider it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You are pretending to be working for Bostwick when you're actually working against him."

He half smiled, pushing out his full lower lip.

"And you're getting in right with the Klan yourself."

He continued to smile. Presently he rose.

"You can't help these things, Jim. It's politics. You take votes where you find them."

When we went down-stairs he had his arm around my shoulders. We stopped in the living-room where Mrs. Meredith was playing solitaire.

"It's too bad you didn't come to-morrow," she said to me, looking at me steadily with those mild light eyes of hers. "Some of the down-state people are coming through on a little campaign trip and Dan and I are going to have them out here for a little party. I wish you could be here."

It sounded unreal to hear her using the word party



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in that sense. There was only one kind of party their down-state friends would enjoy.

"Can't you stay over?"

I shook my head.

"I wish you could," she went on, laying down an ace and continuing to look at me. She was like a woman in a mask. Her voice seemed to come from behind a screen, the words uttered slowly, with an effort. "Mrs. Fitch will be here, and one or two others. And Dan always manages to get some pretty fair stuff for the shaker. Won't you stay?"

No, I said; I couldn't. I had to get back. I stood there awkwardly, trying to think of something to say. I kept looking across at those mild, almost expressionless eyes. For the first time I saw she had cut her hair. Suddenly I looked at Dan, then back at his wife. I had caught the scent of whisky. It couldn't have been from him, for he and I had been together all evening and there had been no drinks.

I got out as quickly as I could. Alice said good-by from behind her card-table. "Drop in at the apartment when we get back to Hamilton," she called.

All the way back on the train I thought of Alice Meredith at her dinner table with her husband's playmates, and Dan rummaging in the pantry for his stuff for the shaker.

It was when I told Fordyce of my chance to go over to the State Committee and run the press bureau that he revealed himself.

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"That's one of the things that come to a newspaper man occasionally," he said. "It's all right so far as the money is concerned. In a year when the candidates were fairly illiterate you could pick up two or three thousand writing speeches. You'd make a lot of money. That isn't the point: you are either a newspaper man or you're not. If you are, low as the paper is, you can't take this other job. That's going over to the enemy."

"Enemy?"

"Sure. You'd be joining the gang. You'd belong to the organization. We're against it, you and I, even if we can't write anything. I remember better days; and I linger along hoping they'll return. If they ever do, if the papers ever come to life, with what we know, you and I, we'll have a job to perform. Anyhow, it's a case of being loyal to something, you hardly know what. The men up-stairs in lots of newspaper offices are just like us, faithful to an idea while they are waiting until the owners quit being business men and decide to be journalists for a change. That's a great reserve force, waiting to spend itself. I may be too old to see the day come, but it's got to. I don't want you to sell yourself down the river."

That was what Meredith had done, years ago.

"Besides, Jim, they just want to use you; that's all. This stuff about liking you and wanting to help you along is sales talk. You have something they can use. Come right down to it, do you know any of them who is capable of doing anything unselfish?"

I didn't. Of course, there was Bostwick.

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"He doesn't count. He doesn't belong. He is an individual, without what the Wilson baiters call 'entangling alliances.' He wouldn't use you because he doesn't want anything for himself. He is the exception that redeems politics and makes it worth while to go on. By the way, did you know Bostwick was laid up? Marberry brought us a story about him being taken ill and asked us not to print."

When I went to the state-house the following Tuesday to tell Meredith I could not take the position at Republican headquarters—Fordyce's comment had settled the question for me—I received my master's degree in applied politics. Referring to the vacant place, Meredith said:

"You'd enjoy it, Jim. Sorry you can't take it. I know you're fond of Bostwick. Well, we're for him; the committee's for him; Senator Albree is for him; everybody's for him. We are going to elect him. You'd be helping put him over."

This was more than a confession of prior treachery. If what he implied was true it meant an inexplicable change of attitude. "What has happened?" I asked.

"We've always been for the candidate . . . technically," he replied, enjoying my eagerness. "Now we are for him in earnest. You knew he'd been sick?"

"Yes. But he's getting well. He'll be out next week."

"You knew what was wrong with him?"

I shook my head.

"An embolism, known among Republicans as Woodrow Wilson's disease. At his age, leading an

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active life, he won't last five years. He may go any time."

I must have looked puzzled, for he went on:

"An embolism means a stroke; paralysis. They usually get over it the first time and then bring a worse one on. The Republicans learned a lot about it from Wilson's case. You get the picture. Steelyard Smith at forty; Theodore Bostwick an old man coming out of his first stroke."

He was laughing, holding a match to his cigar and looking across to see how I would take his revelation.

"The whole strength of the party is behind Bostwick now. I admit, between friends, it wasn't before. We were going to lie down and let Steelyard win. I couldn't say that to every one. But, Jim, we couldn't do that when our man is sick, could we?"

I kept looking at my friend's mouth. Its fixed expression was a mixture of contempt and derision. The old good nature was gone. The underlip had become more prominent.

"You are going to elect Bostwick because he is doomed."

"I didn't say that."

"No; but that's what you mean."

He assumed his judicial air.

"Well, now, Jim, let's look at this in a practical light. It's a damned hard job to manage a Republican organization so it will let a Democrat win without the thing looking suspicious. It can be done, but it's not easy and it's damned inconvenient. We didn't like to try it, but

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we had to eliminate Bostwick. Now if he's going to be eliminated in natural process, why not let him go in for a couple of years—as long as he lasts? See what we gain: His friends will be pleased; we gain their good will and get back a lot of the Progressive vote for the future; we keep our organization intact and there's no risk. Then when Bostwick passes out, we get the seat for one of our own men when the Governor fills the vacancy by appointment. Now, I ask you, isn't that better than defeating him?"

"Than double-crossing him, you mean."

"Jim, you'd never do in politics. You're too damned literal."

"You're betting on Bostwick to die; that's what it amounts to."

"Don't be so exact. We're just trying to act intelligently on our information. That's the way in all businesses."

I was not touched by Bostwick's case. I admired him and respected his ability, but he had had his life. What filled me with a realization of the hopelessness of political life as these men lived it was Meredith's unemotional acceptance of the plan. I made one feeble and futile gesture, thinking, I suppose, of Laurel Fife.

"Dan, I'm different; I'm not in politics. Can't you admit to me you . . . you don't like this?"

"Like it? Jim, listen . . ." and he went on.

It was useless. Meredith felt nothing but his group's hostility for Bostwick in good health; he felt no compassion for him sick. The object was to get him out of

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the way as easily as possible. Dan had not relished the inconvenience of using the party machinery against its own candidate, but he had assented. He now welcomed the opportunity presented by Bostwick's misfortune to appear with the rest of the state's Republicans as whole-heartedly for him. He did not see my point. It was too bad a man had to have a stroke but that could not be helped. And Bostwick was to have some compensation; he would die a senator.

"What if he fools you and lives out his term?"

"We take a chance on that. But he hasn't got it in him to take it easy. He won't rest; he won't diet; he's the conscientious kind who does everything a job calls for. I give him three years."

And so, by virtue of a slight, temporary, but significant first paralysis, Theodore Bostwick was elected United States Senator from Illyria.

## CHAPTER XIV

AS I think of it now I must have been amusing to my friends around the capital in those days. I showed that I expected somebody to be shocked by the double betrayal of Theodore Bostwick, and when nobody was I could not conceal my resentment. But I soon saw I should have to accommodate myself to things as they were.

The men who planned and executed such schemes knew what they were doing. What experts like little Senator Albree and his aid, Seneca Giles, work toward is the accomplished fact, knowing that only an isolated person here and there has the knowledge necessary for a protest or the sustained purpose to make one. I saw that Bostwick's case was a mere incident, a detail.

Discouraged by what I had witnessed and knowing that I could not expect the *Express* to go into the facts, I was ready to quit and go into another field looking for a job; but the intervention of that distant but constant influence, Dixon Latrobe, caused me to postpone such a move. Every time I descended into hopelessness, sitting in my cell pounding out my daily editorials, I was caught up by my knowledge of her expectation for me.

I have not said much about this phase of my modern American love-affair because it seemed to be in suspen-

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sion. I think of it as modern American because I was in love with a girl sufficient to herself and under no compulsion to marry. Like so many post-war girls, Dixon was worth more economically than the average man of her age. I could only guess at her earnings as an actress. The summer she had worked in the Chicago repertoire company she had mentioned a hundred dollars a week in a tone that had suggested she was accustomed to getting more in her regular engagements. So she was not looking to anybody like me for support. I knew that if she should marry me her action would be due to something she saw, or fancied she saw, in me and not to my income or position. Indeed, I might more easily be an annoyance to anybody so competent. I was sufficiently of my generation to appreciate my good fortune in having an understanding with her. At any rate, firing my imagination at intervals, she carried me along. I was always conscious of an implied compact.

I am not so disagreeably masculine that I resented her efforts to make something of me or her suggestions that I needed improvement, for her efforts along that line had always left the inference that she was thinking of me and not of herself. This was the impression even when she was candid to baldness. When she had sent back the stories I had given her to read she was at her best. What she thought was that the stories had not been accepted because they were not good enough. I have never known her to soften the truth. She had written:



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"I suppose magazine editors are something like showmen. They have to offer something that will please their audiences and make the people come again. Your stories have a lot, but, frankly, I should hesitate about putting them out to my customers. However, there is decidedly something to that 'Madame Peggy' character. You've got hold of something there. But instead of trying to get her into a short story you ought to write a play around her. Same scene, same idea, same character, but different form. I see the story in a series of pictures, and where you have 'Madame Peggy' trying to get an engagement to sing and attempting to recall the voice of twenty years before, you just begin to approach a climax; not big enough for the theater, but you might get three or four other ideas to pile up the effect . . . and then, possibly, you'd have a third act."

The result was that, ridiculous as it may sound, I spent the winter working on a play because it was expected of me. Dixon had talked about it as if she meant it. I knew nothing of the mechanics of play-writing except what I had gathered from reading criticisms in the New York papers, but because she had taken my character, "Madame Peggy," seriously I toiled on the thing in my spare time, not with faith or hope but because I wanted to please Dixon.

I knew, too, that I was nearing the end of my time with the *Express*. I was beginning to feel that my life as a newspaper man in Hamilton was unreal; and, as there was such a thing as production for a play once it was written, going to my room and studying the problem of writing one gave me a feeling of preparing in some way for my next move.

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I had told Fordyce of the change I had observed in Alice Meredith, mentioning that Carolyn Fitch had been entertained at the Meredith place in Empire just before the election. I had supposed, I said, that Mrs. Meredith could never bring herself to mingle with Dan's political friends. The detail of the scent of whisky had interested Fordyce.

"That may explain it," he said. "I think I get the whole thing. Stupid and flat as her former life looked to us, it was precious to her. You and I couldn't be annoyed with the society thing in Empire, but you must remember it is important to the people in it. Well, when she made that move to dissolve her marriage she had an idea. She would have set both Dan and herself free and he could have gone his way much more happily. But she was stopped; she found that even her own people were enough a part of the system to insist on her calling it off. My guess is she has been trying to make herself fit in with the other crowd and has started taking a little consolation from Dan's bottles. After all, whisky does set you up for the moment. Once she found that out she might start leaning on it. If Meredith runs true to type he'd welcome that. He'd say she was being a good sport. He'd encourage her. A man like that gets pleasure out of his wife being a good fellow at a party. The result might be a solitary drunk; a woman like Mrs. Meredith, who has always been so extreme the other way, is just the kind to hit it too hard.

"The trouble with you, Jim, is that you want to understand Meredith. He doesn't understand himself.

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Like everybody else he's muddled about himself. He's an extreme case. I wouldn't magnify him so. He's just the raw material being seasoned by the process that produces our governing class. They caught him young. I'd say he's neither good nor bad, but rather weak, and not very important."

Fordyce paused. I could see he wasn't sure that his verdict was complete. He had sensed the quality in Meredith that seemed to set him off from the rest.

"There's something queer about him, too; as if he had his moments of doubt. But if he has them, he always decides he is either on the right track or has gone too far to turn back. Pretty much of a coward; that's about it. The ironic thing about it all is that he can have almost anything he wants politically."

"I've heard him speak of the Senate as if he expected to go there."

"That may be why he has handled his private affairs so stupidly. He and his wife aren't suited; he married her for the advantage of the connection when he started out in Empire. Now he finds himself growing fonder and fonder of everything she detests, but he won't take a divorce on account of the idea that a satisfactory-looking marriage that can be alluded to in the papers is a part of his public equipment. It's that, and perhaps something more. You must keep in mind that Dan never has made anything. He is dependent on the Overton money, just as he set out to be when he married Alice."

I hadn't thought of that. It was hard for me to be-

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lieve that a man wouldn't sacrifice his comfort for his spiritual happiness.

"You're talking about something these fellows don't have," Fordyce retorted. "They don't have any spiritual side."

"I'm sure Dan does . . . even if it's stunted."

"You've got to be practical. He needs thousands every year that he doesn't have. He's got to have the Overtons back of him."

"He is getting into things. I heard he was in an asphalt concern that is doing business with the state."

"What's he trying to do? Break into the penitentiary?"

"He told me it was all right."

"All right for the present; yes. But, Jim, he's got to have more than that. No; Dan Meredith is in too deep. I see what you mean; you think from his charm he should be capable of pulling loose, giving up everything, for the chance to be as fine as you think he ought to be. But they never do that, Jim."

"I wish I knew what makes them that way—these men in politics."

"You can take your choice of the theories. Some say it's the wave of materialism that followed the war. Others say it's because the best men go into business or science. I've heard it blamed on this direct primary that makes men seek the office instead of being chosen for their ability. It's probably a mixture. All I know is we're in bad shape. If you want proof look at the Senate."

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Fordyce's remark, "Pretty much of a coward," stayed with me after he had gone to his own room. It was beginning to look as if that definition of my man fitted. But what kind of system was it that could take a young man like Dan had been the night he had rescued Laurel Fife in that hotel elevator and lead him along until it forced the epithet of coward?

The year 1923 will always be associated in my mind with the raucous voices of newspaper carriers intoning the passing of President Harding through a summer night. The Hamilton papers had some grown carriers whose specialty was to rush bad news in extras into the residential neighborhoods to alarm the householders. Their voices were ominous. When their cries broke my sleep that night I guessed what had happened long before I could distinguish the syllables they were baying.

Perhaps I had been expecting Harding's death. I was a believer in the newspaper legend that teaches one to look for the death of any notable whose illness is made the subject of press association bulletins. An exceptional pope has survived such attention; a king or two has made a partial recovery; but usually the beginning of the regular news watch at the sick-room door is equivalent to a death-warrant. The President had been getting well, but when the first booming notes of the venders floated through my windows my thought was, "The reporters are right again; Harding is dead."

Although we were an afternoon paper and I knew I would not be needed at once, I got up and dressed for

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the office in mechanical obedience to the rules of my occupation. There would be nothing for me to do in connection with extra editions, but Fordyce was out of town and I assumed an editorial on the passing of the President would be wanted as soon as possible for the regular city issues of the day.

Some sleepy printers and two or three men from the news force were in the local room going over the fragmentary reports from San Francisco, preparatory to a more complete edition to follow the extra. The news editor was carrying bulging envelopes out of the library and spilling their contents on a table, looking for cuts large enough for the pictorial display he intended to make. In the composing-room a foreman was laying off the form of a first page across the top of which had been placed in tall thick type the words "President Harding Dies." Two or three typesetting machines were threshing away in the distance. A proof-reader was going through the story of Harding's life, which had been set and held in type from the day he was reported sick. Nobody was talking. These men were neither impressed nor disturbed by the news. They had got out too many extras in their time to be moved by the event.

Our publisher, however, young Mr. Littledale, was in a flutter. In the presence of a big news item, he was afraid everything would not be done properly. He was everywhere, giving unneeded and impractical suggestions, interfering, asking inane questions, getting in the way of busy men who understood their business. Be-

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cause he was thrown into a nervous panic by the thought of getting all there was to tell about Harding into the paper he mistook the calm of the veterans for indifference.

Seeing I could be of no use in the news room, I went to my office and sat down to write an editorial, intending to have it set and corrected to be used whenever the ordinary editions of the day should begin.

I inserted a sheet of copy paper in my typewriter and wrote the heading, *Warren G. Harding*. Then I stopped. I was thinking of the hundreds of other newspaper editorial writers sitting in their offices at the same moment unable to get any farther than the heading. What was a man to write about Harding,—anybody who knew the conditions of his nomination and anything about the capture of the government by his genial companions?

Few, I reflected, would be writing anything to the point. Most of the editorial writers would produce automatically the newspaper idea of what people expect to read in an obituary editorial on a public man.

While I was musing, Mr. Littledale put his head in my door and asked, "Will you have an editorial?"

"Of course."

"How do you think it had better be headed?"

"Oh, just his name; just *Warren G. Harding*."

"Don't you think you had better have something like *The Nation Mourns*?"

"But it won't be mourning. It never does. Newspapers are gradually getting away from that vein."

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I spoke from a misguided desire to talk to him frankly. He looked puzzled and cross. I saw I should not have answered him that way. He didn't understand what I was getting at.

"But if our competition comes out with that and we don't some of our readers won't like it. They may think we didn't like Harding. The circulation manager told me that when Wilson took sick our editorial writer kept discussing his policies as if nothing had happened. Some subscribers stopped their papers."

"Well, you are the publisher; whatever you say."

"I think you'd better head your editorial *The Nation Mourns*. Are you going to use black rules?"

"I hadn't thought of it."

"It won't do any harm. We don't want to offend anybody. We've picked up a lot of new readers with our prize contests this year and I want to try to keep them. I think I'd emphasize Harding's kind heart and his loyalty to his friends. Work in the fact that he was a newspaper man."

What he meant was that he wanted to make certain I wasn't going to write anything outside the lines of the stereotyped comment for the occasion.

"I think we ought to compare him with McKinley. That would make a lot of readers feel good and it couldn't make anybody mad," he added as he closed the door.

So I threw the sheet of paper on the floor and inserted a fresh one, tapping out across the top, "Editorial, Proof to Preston at once. 'The Nation Mourns'."



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The next day J. Howard Littledale was absorbed in one of those projects for the welfare of Hamilton and the advertisement of the *Express* that he was always bringing forward and insisting that some public official or some civic body adopt. I noticed three or four merchants, Senator Albree, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, the chairman of the Republican State Committee, and the Mayor finding their way to his office. The news editor told me the object of the conference.

"J. Howard is trying to get Albree to use his influence to have Harding's funeral train routed through here. He thinks it would be good business. It would attract a lot of country people into town for the day, especially if the train were parked in the station for an hour or so. Of course, Albree will have to agree to try, but I don't think he likes the idea. Everybody but J. Howard seems to know this is no time for an *Express* stunt, but nobody has courage enough to tell him so."

But Albree either would not or could not do it. If he ever sent a telegram to California, the needs of Hamilton were set aside. The train carrying the body of President Harding to Washington crossed Illyria fifty miles south of Hamilton and there was no extra throng of rural buyers in town until the next Dollar Day.

## CHAPTER XV

THE descendants of a mild-looking middle-aged man named Prentice who was living in Illyria at this time will tell how grandfather or great-grandfather rose by his own efforts from obscurity until he was called to be governor. They will not record that if the arteries of Senator Theodore Bostwick had not reached their climax of calcification in 1924 their ancestor would not have been governor, but that the place would have gone to Daniel Scott Meredith.

For the governorship was next in Dan's scheme. But Senator Albree, coming home from Washington with reports almost clinical in their detail, said Bostwick could not live another year. That forced a reconsideration. What was needed was a governor who, on Bostwick's death, would appoint Dan Meredith to the Senate to fill the vacancy. The voice of the people answered by Sam Prentice was simulated by the high sharp tones of the little senior Senator as he sat in the Great Valley Hotel.

Of course, Albree admitted judicially, even as governor, Dan could have the senatorship when Bostwick died. Being governor he could resign, whereupon the lieutenant-governor, succeeding to the chair, would appoint him to the Senate. When Knox, of Pennsylvania,

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had died this method had been discussed, for Governor Sproul was desired in the Senate. Sproul could have gone there by the resignation process, but he had not invoked it. It was a way, Albree went on, but he didn't like to use it except in an extreme case. Besides, it might be bad to let a young man like Dan have both the governorship and the Senate seat. He would not have long to wait for the latter. As Bostwick was so far gone, having had a second stroke, Albree would like, he said, to see Dan step aside and let Sam Prentice be governor, with the senatorship understood as a part of the bargain. Sam had been a good party man for years and had never had anything. "Let's nominate Sam for governor this time," said the oracle. "It will be easy to elect him in a Coolidge year. That will take care of Sam. I've been trying for five years to fix him up."

I suppose McHenry, whom Bostwick had defeated for the senatorial nomination, might have been considered for governor at this juncture, but he had been engaged as the Washington representative of some water-power interests.

So Sam Prentice was fixed up. The reward was in recognition of services in the southwestern corner of the state where Tom Albree had always been weak. In this way, a man of the people was caused to appear, proving the virtue of the existing plan by which free citizens chose their own rulers. Albree was pleased by the outcome. Prentice had been on his mind. It is not often a great man has a chance to take care of two major items simultaneously. Albree himself would come

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up in 1926; it was a good thing to put the organization into sound condition.

So thoroughly had the Senator gone into the condition of his colleague in Washington that he had himself adopted a strict diet. He had acquired a sudden but deep respect for the part that the arteries play in the destinies of nations. He took his statesmanship seriously. He had already voluntarily joined the public abstainers so he could count the professional prohibitionist vote in advance. He now decided it was imperative for him to limit himself to meat once a week. He saw that if Bostwick had been abstemious things would be much more difficult to arrange.

Nationally, it will be remembered, there was no contest that year. A Republican convention was almost superfluous; an unnecessary expense and formality. The party had to put up Coolidge; not to do so would have been too hard to explain. Republican victory was a certainty, and so strong was the Coolidge conviction that party leaders knew state tickets, even if weak, would go in on the Coolidge tide.

Albree didn't have to persuade Dan to give up the governorship. Dan understood. All he had to do was go on the ticket for another term as Secretary of Public Affairs and wait for nature to take its course with Senator Bostwick.

There were reasons for avoiding the governorship. Spencer was leaving the office in a mess. He had used the state's money in his private pursuits and had lost it. He was going to need all the strength of the organ-

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ization to keep from going to prison. The general political decay had not reached the courts. Grand juries still indicted, and convictions were still to be had by state's attorneys who desired them.

Meredith did not censure Spencer for anything but stupidity, I suspected, but he saw that the incoming governor would have to enforce rigid economies until the funds Bostwick had taken were restored by tax revenues. Meredith had no taste for that kind of an administration. He was counseled against it.

"Let Prentice put the treasury back on its feet, son," Seneca Giles had advised, according to a report of a conference that reached Fordyce. "You don't want to be bothered with that," the old man had said.

The outgoing Governor, Spencer, was to be permitted to retire in peace. An inquiry would shake the confidence of the people in their government. There was no demand for an inquiry. It must be remembered that what was known was among friends; the newspapers had published nothing. An artificial calm was as good as a wholesome quiet if it could be preserved. There was no good to be accomplished by stirring up trouble. An accounting for wrong seemed an amusing fiction, one of the legends of the dim past. If necessary, wealthy beneficiaries of the system could be called upon to repair the damage with a private pooling of funds.

The traditional doctrine of definite evil had been repealed by persistent repudiation. A conscientious young preacher, speaking from the text, "It is of Thy great mercies that we are not consumed," and deploring con-

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tempt for civil and moral canons, was complained against as a ranter in his own board by a minor state official who, sitting in a pew, had taken the general censure personally. A minister who wished to be popular found it advantageous to address luncheon clubs on the gospel of service and the application of the Golden Rule in business. Listening to such talk made hearers feel that they had applied that rule.

Another noticeable phenomenon was the spread of the scientific attitude toward criminality. Criminals, said the new scientists, were born that way and were not responsible for their overt acts. Punishment for crimes of violence was tending toward abolition. Pure right and wrong had ceased to exist. Every crime, no matter how revolting, was debatable; every criminal had his advocates, not to say admirers.

In personal affairs, the thing to avoid was dulness; the thing to seek was cleverness, and above all, a good time. Many ministers seemed to have suspended the teaching of conduct while interesting themselves in politics, assisting into office those who would give lip service to the prohibition law.

The diminutive dictator of Illyria, Tom Albree, was himself technically honest, Fordyce was certain. The prize he desired for himself was not money but an increasingly fortified position of power. He was, as a matter of fact, a poor man whose wants as a bachelor were simple and few.

The defect in the structure he had built was in the weakness of key members. Here and there were men

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who could not keep out of trouble. One source of such trouble was the practical exemption of men in high positions from the rigors of prohibition. The Senator was rather Spartan; nobody would find him in difficulties springing from indulgence. But the restraint he practised was not to be expected from the others.

I can see now that the over-confidence, the contemptuous assurance, inspired by the agreement to let Spencer off without penalty for his abuse of the governorship quickly resulted in perilous foolhardiness that was expressed in apparently small but significant ways. It was this foolhardiness, this defiance of consequences, that now appeared as Meredith's predominant trait.

We were then in the first of the vogue of that form of good time known as the "party." This had superseded most other kinds of diversion. It was a simple affair that required only that the guests have a clear understanding of each other's freedom from inhibitions and that either the host or guests or both provide plenty of liquor. The object of the party was for the members to get drunk in their preferred degrees. For a good party, six or eight men and women were desirable. Two or three quarts of whisky, a quart or two of gin, a bottle of wine, some ginger ale, orange juice, cigarettes and food were needed. This style of drinking had brought about the abolition of manners. Frank concentration on the liquor itself was the conspicuous substitute for all niceties and refinements.

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Yet there was a carefully sustained fiction that one's own party was always good, and, of course, "decent," to use the descriptive term in use. A decent party was one at which nobody was helpless at the end; anything short of that was decent. That was how the party habit was rationalized. One's own friends just dropped in, had a drink or two, and went home. The parties at which stupefaction ensued or violence took place were always somebody else's. Just the same, it was growing increasingly common for friends to have these parties and to be dissatisfied with any evening that had to be gone through without liquor. I am thinking now of people the age of the Merediths and older who, carried away by the sentiment glorifying youth, had decided they too were of the younger generation.

Some of them were fitted for parties and some were not. For instance, there was remorse. The end products of generations of moralists, the inheritors of the Presbyterian attitude, should not have imagined they could endure the morning after.

Women, for example. Many of them in their middle and late thirties were mentally disqualified for excess. Their training had all been the other way. They were old enough to remember the days of social restraint and convention, when the word "lady" was in common use. Many of them were active in churches. Uninfluenced by what they came to believe was the smart thing to do, they would not, probably, have been found trying to analyze the effects of successive doses of gin during demonstrations of the new era in drinking. Their drunk-



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eness harassed them terribly with regret; worry assisted the dissipation in erasing their normal good looks.

The old grace, the ceremonial, of drinking had been lost somewhere between the saloon and the living-room. It was almost nothing but gulping. As Fordyce remarked to me, manners that never would have been tolerated in a well-ordered barroom were all right in the home. One might have expected the feminine to refine the rites of the bottle but it had not. The rites themselves had departed. Parlor drinking was without form, or the temperate, judicial appreciation of what merit was to be found in sound Monongahela rye. Men who had been proud to be able to take a number of cocktails or highballs without showing them had been succeeded by those whose perverted pride was in speedy oblivion.

It was impossible to estimate the scope of the mixed drinking party. Probably the majority in any state of life had not been affected by it, but it was equally probable that all states were contributing to the coteries of addicts. The supposition was that the towns, villages and country communities were not deeply affected; that the party was a city phenomenon. The political circle that came under my direct notice was beginning to be spotted with men and women who were always alluding to the last party and making plans for the next. Meredith and his associates were like that, meeting here and there for dinners which were usually mere preludes to the serious business of drinking.

The politicians who wanted it were well supplied with

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liquor. Sheriffs, prosecuting attorneys or federal prohibition agents sometimes found it cheap and convenient to use contraband as a means of ingratiating themselves with men whose influence they desired. The system of accounting for liquor taken in raids was found to have holes through which whole cases of whisky could be passed. This was considered proper among friends. If a sheriff had just seized a stock of especially fine whisky and knew that a county or district chairman, a state official, or even a judge, was entertaining, it was the best of form for a deputy or the sheriff himself to drive up to the kitchen door of the big man with a contribution for the guests. Easy access probably had something to do with the free flow in official life in the first five years of prohibition.

Meredith's parties grew famous as their incidents were told by participants; and they were fascinating to me because, from what I heard, his wife had become a good fellow at a party. The unnaturalness of this was almost ghastly. Remembering her insistent, unimaginative devotion to housekeeping back in Empire, her respect for society and the observances of convention, I was convinced that she must have assented to and then joined the new order as the result of a sense of futility amounting to despair. A woman such as she had been a few years before would have resisted transformation by the erosion of her husband's nature. That being true, I knew she must have endured much in the process, before surrendering.

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I did not appreciate how far things had gone until I went to one of these parties at Meredith's apartment. I had met Dan on the street and he had said, "Come up to the flat to-night; we're going to have a little party. Come up after dinner."

As I went into the little apartment living-room I had an impression of staleness as if the people had been sitting there smoking and talking a long time. Some of them must have been with the Merediths for dinner. It was hot. Steam had been turned on with the coming of November crispness so that the unventilated room was almost unbearable.

Through the murk I made out Sam Prentice, the new Governor who would be inaugurated in January. He was standing in the arch leading to the dining-room holding a tall glass. His pallid lined face with its ineffectual mustache was turned toward me as if he had paused to see if the newcomer were one of the ones known as all right. Prentice had been ratified by the drys on his record in politics, so he was under sentence to be furtive for the next four years. Beside him stood Carolyn Fitch in a peach-colored taffeta gown. She gave me a cold nod, perhaps remembering my part in Meredith's affairs, and went on with what she had been saying to the Governor-elect.

On a davenport against the wall Mrs. Meredith was seated between Benedict Hightower and Corey Atchison. Evidently friends from Empire had dropped in. My hostess waved to me and gave me a smile that

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made me think she was not coordinating. I did not see her husband at first, but in a moment I discovered him in the dining-room where he was opening ginger ale with Mrs. Fred Skillman, the wife of a young Hamilton attorney who was just beginning to appear in politics. Mrs. Skillman had been paying attention to her husband's interests by cultivating the state officials. Skillman himself was nowhere to be seen, but that was not significant. The lady was the kind who got along very well by herself.

Mrs. Corey Atchison, a fragile, nice-looking little person, was sitting alone near the fireplace; so, after I had spoken to Mrs. Meredith and Dan, I went to her and asked if I might sit with her.

Almost at once Mrs. Skillman charged across to us with rye highballs. Evidently she was taking charge. Some woman, usually not the hostess, always kept the glasses filled at such affairs. Mrs. Atchison held hers a moment and then put it on a table at her elbow.

"I'm not much good in a place like this," she said, as if some explanation were needed. "Corey and I were in town for the day and he went to the state-house to see Mr. Meredith. The result is, we stay over and Corey will be drunk and ugly. It isn't much fun. I've formed the habit of bringing an overnight bag and an evening dress when we come to Hamilton; people always insist on dragging us in on something like this."

Dan, looking astonishingly large in a dinner coat and a crumpled shirt bosom, came up just then to notice her untouched glass. He didn't like that.

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"Carolyn," he called. "Mrs. Atchison is holding out on us. She wants to be the only sober person in the party. That's too exclusive."

"I'd make her husband take her home," Mrs. Fitch called back, "and then come back to the bunch." I glanced sidewise at my companion; ordinarily a woman like Mrs. Fitch would never have had an opportunity to make such a coarse allusion to Mrs. Atchison.

"Corey," she was going on blatantly, still standing in the archway with Prentice, "the Senator says your wife's spoiling the party!"

Mrs. Atchison seemed to be examining one of the fire-irons. She paid not the slightest attention to the voices around her.

"Senator!" Atchison exclaimed in derision, ignoring the reference to his wife. "Dan, you'll make a hell of a senator. You don't know what's going on. You haven't opened a book for five years."

"He doesn't need to!" his champion intervened before Dan could speak for himself. "Dan's a natural genius, just like Abraham Lincoln."

Hightower, sitting beside Mrs. Meredith, laughed and tossed his shock of white hair. "Alice,"—I was surprised to hear him use her given name,—"Dan has the ladies of the party ready to fight for him."

Alice shook her glass with a circular motion and then finished it, making a face.

"And over him, too," she observed. When she put her glass down she knotted her fingers on her knees as if trying to make herself be still.

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"Mrs. Atchison," Dan insisted, leaning over the chair, "your husband thinks you ought to take a little drink."

"He has been thinking that for years. He will take enough for us both. I never use it. You must excuse me. I am quite all right; I have a good time in my own way."

Alice was walking, it seemed to me slowly and deliberately, toward the dining-room, Atchison following. As they passed him, Prentice turned and wavered after.

"There goes Sam after more liquor," Dan chuckled. "We'll have to send somebody home with him. Won't do for him to be seen soused."

Amused by the Governor, he forgot Mrs. Atchison and disappeared.

This was what the whole evening would be like, unredeemed by wit or wisdom. The parade back and forth between seats in the living-room and the bottles in the dining-room would go on and on endlessly. The guests might go at two or three; some of them might have to spend the night.

When Alice reappeared I almost jumped at the change. A lock of her light hair had fallen along her strained anxious face, and she was trying to put it into place with fingers that would not obey. Her underlip was sagging. As she came toward us she tripped and half fell into her seat on the davenport.

"Dan," Benny Hightower observed to the room at large, "your wife is tight."

Two or three laughs followed this.

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"Not tight; not a bit tight. Tight yourself." Alice straightened her shoulders and turned to frown at her companion. "Not tight. Just need another drink."

"Corey," Benny ordered, "bring the lady another drink."

Through the arch I saw Dan pouring while Prentice and Mrs. Skillman held out glasses. The rooms seemed to be revolving, though I had not tasted my liquor. There was something threatening, dreadfully mechanical, something pitiful, about the scene. I set my glass beside Mrs. Atchison's.

"I think I'll go," I told her. "I enjoy a drink, but this sort of thing worries me. I don't understand it."

She brightened. "I wish you would get Corey and make him go too."

"I'll try, but you know how he is."

"If he won't go you can get me a taxi."

I went over to the davenport and tried to get Mrs. Meredith's attention.

"I just dropped in. I think I'll be running along. Sorry not to be able to stay."

"Why, Jim, we're going to have refreshments pretty soon."

They were actually going to add food to everything else. Under the circumstances the word "refreshments" had a humorous suggestion. All the more reason for escaping, I thought.

"Sorry to miss the refreshments, but Mrs. Atchison and Corey are going, and I shall take them to the hotel in my car. Then I have to go and do some work."

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Corey leaned across Alice and glared at me.

"Who said I was going? Mildred, I suppose."

"She asked me to bring you. She's getting her wrap."

"Well, you take her down to the hotel. I'll be there after while. Don't want to break up a good party. Mildred always runs off like this. My friends are used to her."

I started away, then turned back to say good night to Mrs. Meredith. She was gone. She was in the dining-room again.

"He won't come," I told Mrs. Atchison. "Are you afraid to leave him?"

"Oh, no. My whole life has been like this. If you are going now I should appreciate your taking me to the hotel."

Nobody saw us out. People came and went like that at these parties. It was part of the admired informality of the period.

My companion was a gentle, sweet-faced woman, beautifully gowned, and altogether composed, a contrast to the chattering, unreserved examples we had left behind. There was about her something remote, inscrutable, a quality that reminded me faintly of Laurel Fife. It suggested that Mrs. Atchison knew what she was doing. Her plight, being left by an indifferent husband to find her way back to their hotel, had impressed me as pathetic. How a man could neglect her for such amusement as he could expect in Meredith's flat was impossible to explain.

Mrs. Atchison, however, was serene. When I was



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about to leave her at the elevator in the Great Valley she shook hands and said with a little smile:

"Don't feel sorry for me. I have found this is the best way with Corey. He will follow when he gets enough and he will not be as far gone as he would if I had stayed. I have tried both ways. My refusing to take part seems to touch his remaining scrap of conscience. At heart he is the older type, pretending to like the new freedom. He thinks he wants me to stay and get tight with the rest, but he doesn't. Secretly he is glad his own wife is out of it. So many of my friends are trying the good sport business at these parties. The men don't tell them the truth. My guess is the men do not really want them, but they are afraid to say so. Anyhow, I run away as a matter of strategy."

When I left her I had something new to think about. I had met a woman who at least was bringing to bear on the new situation some original and definite thinking. I wondered which way was the wiser, hers or that of the women who went along.

I could not put out of my mind the picture of Alice Meredith lurching across her living-room. To me it was not an isolated, inconsequential incident. Especially considered with Mrs. Atchison's attitude, it seemed to mean something.

When I went to the office the next morning to begin the day's work I was still thinking about her. I remember hesitating before taking up the *Hamilton Morning Journal* which lay on my desk, placed there

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by the office boy. It was my habit to glance over it before doing anything else.

Close followers of events as newspaper men are will understand that with what I had been pondering I could not have been exactly astonished at the *Journal's* lead story that morning. My first reaction was the fleeting reflection that what was spread there was as logical as the newsboys' crying the death of Harding through the night.

I sat down in my chair and said to myself, "So this is what it meant." For the heading said:

"Wife of Public Affairs Secretary Dies Suddenly. Mrs. Meredith Takes Poison in Mistake for Medicine."

I sat there and absorbed the story. Dan Meredith, it ran, had said that he and his wife had entertained some guests at dinner. After they had gone the Merediths had gone to bed, some time after midnight. Mrs. Meredith had complained of a headache and had been unable to sleep. Meredith had heard her going to the cabinet in the bathroom for some tablets she was in the habit of taking. He had thought he heard her returning to her room and so had gone to sleep. At two o'clock he had been called by the maid, who had found Mrs. Meredith on the floor of the bathroom, dead. The bottle of tablets was shattered on the tiles. Evidently she had taken an overdose. Her doctor had cautioned her, telling her she must beware of medicines affecting the heart.

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The *Journal* added that the coroner had been called but had decided that an inquest was unnecessary. He said it was a plain case of too much of the drug. Mr. and Mrs. Overton were on their way from Empire to take charge of their daughter's funeral, arrangements for which would be announced.

I was sitting there looking at the page, thinking of Alice Meredith as I had seen her a few hours before, when John Fordyce came and stood inside my door.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"I was there a while last night."

"Nice quiet dinner; everything just as he says, I suppose?"

"Well, hardly; I wasn't there for dinner."

"Who was there?"

"Sam Prentice, Mrs. Fitch, Benny Hightower,—two or three others. I dropped in afterward."

"I see; regular party. Everybody tight."

"Not everybody. I left early. Some of them were pretty well started."

"Well, is it suicide or an accident?"

"I don't know."

"But you have your suspicions."

I didn't answer.

"Of course, in the papers it is an accident. You notice Meredith got the coroner there the first thing and put him on record. That settles the official side. Officially, it is an accident. There is no going behind the coroner. But I think the accidental overdose story is a little threadbare."

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Presently he added: "It amounts to the same either way. She couldn't stand the racket."

"I don't see how the men can, the way they pour it down."

"They can't. If this keeps on the bill will come in sooner or later. These mixed carouses won't do. Somebody will have to set a new style."

"She was a tragic sight, trying to be a good fellow."

"I know the type; pitiful."

"How will this affect Dan?"

"Politically? Not at all. On the face of it, nothing happened. You see how it is. Any man's wife may meet with an accident. That isn't hard to put over."

"But the people who were there know."

"Yes; but they are all right. That's the reason they were there. No; it won't make any difference to him. He can go on just the same. Unless his wife had her own money he may have financial trouble. If they have been getting help from the Overtons he may have to figure."

"He's due to be senator when Bostwick dies."

"That's true. He'll get the appointment just the same. But when it comes to being a candidate for the full term he will need some money. A primary campaign would cost a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty thousand. The candidate or his friends have to put that up; and with all these investigations the manufacturers and financiers have got cautious about contributing. But maybe Mrs. Meredith had her own money. In that case he'll be in fair shape."

"What are we printing about the death?"

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"Just what was given out. We'll run her cut and rewrite the morning paper story. You didn't suppose we'd say there had been a booze party, and that the new Governor was there and everybody got cock-eyed?"

"No; I didn't suppose that."

"You can't publish the facts in these cases."

"No; I suppose not. But isn't that one reason such things go on?"

"Yes; that's one reason. I don't know the answer. All I know is that no paper in this town would publish the truth about the quiet little dinner at your friend Dan's."

When I went out I sent a message to Dixon reading:

"His wife was found dead to-day. Coroner says overdose headache medicine. Will write or see you. Use your judgment telling Laurel."

I stood at the counter and studied the paper, thinking what this news would mean to Laurel. Dan was free now. He might in time go to Laurel. That was quite possible. And only two persons, he and I, could give her the picture of Alice Meredith to which she would have a right. Dan would know that whether his wife took too much drug by accident or design he was answerable the moment he went to see Laurel.

But I had to send a message. Rereading it, I reflected that Laurel Fife was aware of the way things went in the world. I saw that I had written "Coroner says overdose." Laurel, I decided, would understand what that way of putting it was intended to convey.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE death of Mrs. Meredith was, as Fordyce had predicted, just a piece in the papers. A public officer had lost his wife in a deplorable accident; people said, "Too bad," and went on with their own affairs. Nobody thought of her death as a comment on her husband; nobody recognized it as a part in a tragedy of stupidity.

Everybody believed, or pretended to believe, the official story. There are comfort and reassurance in official statements; inconvenience and confusion result when persistent and unbelieving persons insist on going behind formal announcements. The coroner had reported accidental death; that was regrettable but not disconcerting, as a hint of suicide would have been.

Anyhow,—leaving out the dozen persons close to the Merediths,—nobody could have established a motive for suicide. That, by the general trite construction would have implied a story of infidelity; and the popular description of infidelity was lacking. Meredith had not been unfaithful to Alice in that way, though he might have been and yet have appeared more admirable.

He was incapable of promiscuous risks, not from inherent preference for chastity but through caution. He had rather clumsily attempted to play with realistic little Nellie Crisp who, upon being invited to drive to

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the country, had taken an overnight bag as a matter of course. And that episode had developed in keeping with the man. He of all men would be found there alone, having taken his angry and drunken guest to the railway, her dyed lips streaming with invective. And on his table would be found her hand-bag. Ludicrously, this was not unfaithfulness, but innocence! Coarseness, absence of sense and sensitiveness did not count. There must be an overt act.

The other woman with whom he had been connected by the gossips was Mrs. Fitch, and he was less guilty in his relationship there. We had a smart woman on the *Express* who had analyzed Mrs. Fitch for me when everybody else was disposing of her case in obvious and common terms. This woman reporter had studied Carolyn and had interpreted her in a way that helped explain Meredith.

Meredith suspected Mrs. Fitch, to begin with, betraying a not uncommon protective instinct. He knew that she had been presented for the consideration of the party by former Governor Spencer, the habitual altruist. That made Meredith wary. He had tried to be just agreeable enough to avoid her ill-will. He need not have worried; she was more discerning than he or the other great men of Illyria knew. His uneasiness in her presence, when she had gone to him about the position she wanted with the women's branch of the state organization, had been easily construed. She knew he was afraid of her, and that at first amused her; but when the half-literate gamin at the typewriter had

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boasted that she was keeping a rendezvous with the Secretary of Public Affairs, Mrs. Fitch was furious. With her he had been so unnecessarily virtuous. It had been a simple matter for her to vent her momentary wrath by causing a telephone call to Mrs. Meredith in Empire.

No; Meredith had not been unfaithful to his wife. He had been a bungler but had remained a good man.

(You see from this that the passages in his biography dealing with his marriage are true and correct. There was nothing in the official record to contradict any of the statements.)

I dislike intruding my own story, but at this point I resigned from the *Express* and left Hamilton. I can not explain my resignation. One day I had not written it; the next day I had, and while I could not have told why, I knew the act had been inevitable. It was time for me to move on.

To my friends outside the office, my decision was without foundation in common sense. I had what is called a good job; I was immune from the fluctuations of the labor market; I was intimate with influential people; I was comfortable, and I was saving money. The chances were I would succeed Fordyce some day. I could buy Hamilton real estate on the instalment plan. If I were prudent I could qualify little by little, year by year, for the rôle of prominent citizen.

My quitting may have been the last unconscious protest of an itinerant newspaper man against going



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respectable. At any rate, I resigned, served out my two weeks' notice, and, a week after I had written my last safe editorial on the *Express*, I was in New York, living in a walk-up in the West Fifties close to the Elevated. I had no job; I was not comfortable, and I was living on capital. If anybody had called me a fool the epithet would not have been without justification in the rules for success.

At twenty-nine when, according to the formula given by successful men when interviewed for the magazines, a young man should be getting settled and buying Pennsylvania Common out of income, I had suddenly unsettled myself. One week I had been a flattered molder of public opinion in a thriving city; the next week I was among the unemployed.

I speak of the apartment where I went to live as if it had been my own. What happened was that I went to live with two friends, men I had once worked with elsewhere on newspapers. One was now writing and editing catalogues for an art auction gallery; the other was furnishing gags to a number of comic strip artists. Both belonged to that curious fringe of journalism and the arts that contains so many men who can not adjust themselves to conventional routine occupations. They had often said, "Jim, if you ever come to New York, come in with us." I had taken them up.

They would have taken me in had I been penniless; but as it happened I did not have to impose on them. I had saved something, which, I let them know, would be considered cash capital for the three of us when in

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need. My reaction to the carefulness in which life in Illyria had schooled me was a desire to spend a lot of money wastefully. My unexpected exhibit in the form of a savings-bank book made me unique among journalists, but it had the effect of letting my friends know that they would not have to support me while I was looking for work. While they were living from hand to mouth, they were in no position to pay for my shelter and meals.

I suppose what was the matter with me at this time was my sense of Dan Meredith's failure. I felt there was something about him and about the Illyrian situation in general that I could not understand. Close contemplation had been painful. I wanted to get away from it.

My only asset besides my savings was the incomplete manuscript of *Madame Peggy*. If one could call its parts acts it had two and a half. I had written right up to the conclusion and there had stuck.

I had been unable to write any more, for I did not know how to end the play. I knew how it should end, but I had heard and read so much about softening and leading a story away from reality in order to keep from wounding the delicate senses of an imaginary audience that I was afraid to go on and finish it according to my original plan. So I had put the typewritten pages in my trunk and had taken the train for New York impelled by the desire to be where I could see and talk with Dixon and Laurel.

They were not working that spring but were in re-

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treat at Laurel's Long Island place, reached through interminable glades of dogwood, down unbelievably winding lanes bordered with little wildflowers. Broadway and road, *The Enchantress* had run three seasons. Weary, Laurel had finally withdrawn from the cast, going to this country house for a rest and taking Dixon with her.

Between the death of Mrs. Meredith and my departure I had seen Dan only twice. I had gone to call on him in his office in the state-house soon after the funeral. That time he did not treat me intimately. Perhaps it was too soon. He was soberly dressed, for him, though he was not in black, and he had that washed-and-ironed look that new-made widowers so often show. He was formal, making conventional replies to my conventional comments. He was acting out the story the public had been told, playing a handsome young official grievously bereaved. He was not ready to unbend even to his close friends. To anybody who had looked on at close range as I had his manner was surprising.

Our other meeting was at a luncheon that had been given for the purpose of inducing business men to favor an issue of state bonds for the improvement of highways. He was the speaker of the day, representing the desires of the State Highway Commission for a greater supply of money. The audience was composed of the down-town men belonging to the Hamilton Rotary, Kiwanis, Civic, Exchange, and Lions' Clubs, with the

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Chamber of Commerce, the Credit Men's Association and some other bodies also represented.

After the four hundred had eaten and sung, Dan addressed them, telling them their duty as citizens to lend their influence to persuading people to vote the bonds. He reminded me of an evangelist as he poured out period after period of trite commonplaces in a voice warm with the fervor he could assume on a moment's notice. To these men who spent every day dealing in facts, he gave none, confining himself to the usual good-roads generalities. He could have been specific, I thought, as I listened from the back of the room; for he had told me himself of being a part owner in an asphalt plant that sold its products to this same Highway Commission.

But he knew how to talk to business men, and when he sat down the room rattled with the hand clapping. I could tell that Dan's hearers had been stirred even in the drowsy post luncheon hour by his physical force and magnetism. They did not know any more about the proposition than before; they did not know how much the bonds would increase their taxes or how the money would be spent; but as they streamed off to the cloakrooms they were smiling and talking excitedly, pleased with themselves and with the speaker. Dan must be himself again, I thought, judging by the success of his performance. I waylaid him in the hotel lobby.

"Jim, glad to see you! How did it go? Did I put it over?" \*

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He left the group in which he had been standing and came to me, putting an arm around my shoulder. Dan had picked up such habits with the years.

"Jim, I want to talk to you. Let's go somewhere and sit down."

The crowd had melted. Having done what had been asked of them, the merchants, manufacturers, bankers, doctors, lawyers and dentists were in a hurry to get back to work. We found a quiet spot in the lobby where we sat on a sofa. He started in immediately with what was in his mind.

"Alice's death has changed me. I couldn't say this to everybody, but I don't want any more parties, I don't say I'm going on the wagon; that isn't necessary. But I'm going to be careful. This thing of getting blind staggering drunk won't do. And no more drinking with the women. It's bad for them and us too."

That was all right as a proposition, but it wasn't very much to the point. I was silent.

"Jim," he said, "I've a funny feeling about you. I've had it ever since that night. You sat there and didn't take anything and pretty soon you took Mrs. Atchison home. She didn't take anything either. It was rough on the rest of us. And then, after we found Alice, I couldn't get it out of my mind that you were holding me responsible."

"Well, weren't you?"

"But, Jim, honest, I don't know what happened. You see, I passed out and went and lay down on my bed. The party broke up without me. The next thing I knew

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the maid was hammering on my door. I was still pretty well under. I've always wondered if there was anything wrong with the gin . . . Jim, you think she killed herself, don't you?"

"No, Dan; I just don't know. I wish I did. But whether she did or not, you led her into it. She took up your life, and she wasn't fitted for it."

He sat with his fingers knit, staring at the rug.

"No; she wasn't fitted for it. And I didn't have sense enough to know it. Other men were having their wives along on parties. It seemed all right at the time."

"You were keeping rotten company, Dan. You've never been particular enough."

He ignored that. "You know what I want to do? I want to see Laurel Fife. I'd like to begin all over again."

I had my answer ready for that.

"The first thing you'll have to tell her is how Alice happened to die. That has got to come first. If you ever try to go back to Laurel you will either tell her the whole story or I shall. Any time you try to make a new start there you've got to come clean. Don't forget that."

"You mean that, don't you, Jim?"

"Yes, Dan; and I mean it partly on your account. What's made you miss it in life is your failure to come clean at the right times. That's the way with you politicians."

"I can think back, now I am free. I can think of Laurel. I can see how fine she is and always has been; and how she has gone ahead, just being that way."

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"Well, you've got to think straight from now on. I can't speak for her. I don't know how she feels about you. All I say is, you'll never get a chance to fool her."

"Funny, isn't it?" he mused. "I'll probably be senator when I'm thirty-seven or eight, young as Beveridge was when he went in over there in Indiana. I ought to be the happiest man in the state, but this thing about Alice has mixed me up. I didn't love her; I'm not grieving for her. But damn it, Jim, there was something kind of pathetic about her there at the last. You know that. It was as if she were making some kind of an effort. She was making a last stand, and she wasn't made for the life. It was bound to get her sooner or later."

Perhaps, I thought, it was either that she had been making an effort to conform to the conventions of his life or she had taken to whisky in despair, as Fordyce had suggested. Nobody would ever know.

He was growing restless. Men like Meredith can not be still long at best, and when they are disturbed, as he was, they have to keep moving. His manner and a strained, weary expression that fell across his eyes when he was off guard, made me feel that he was more worried than he was willing to confess.

"You ought to begin at the beginning," I hazarded. "Find yourself without appealing to Laurel or allowing yourself to think about her. You cut yourself off from her. You are out."

"How do you mean, find myself?"

"Fit yourself for these public offices; take them

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seriously; try to do the people some good. Just a few minutes ago you spoke for the Highway Commission in favor of their racket. You ought to pull out of that. You talk about getting back with Laurel . . .”

“Jim, you don’t understand politics. If a lot of you idealists got in nothing would ever get done. This is the only way. A few thousand dollars here and there don’t matter when the volume is so large. The state has got to have roads. You’ve got to judge things by the results. When the people are riding on the roads they won’t care what they cost!”

I knew he was serious. His was the view of his type. He did not see anything wrong.

“It’s the same principle as this oil business they’re making so much fuss about. The main thing is to get the oil in tanks at the stations for the navy. The details don’t matter so much. They talk about graft and bribes; hell! Why, your own paper has said that people would have to give the Harding administration credit for putting the fuel oil where the navy could get at it. It’s the same with roads. It ain’t graft. You’ve got to get things done.”

I recalled our editorials on the oil situation,—the conventional position of a paper that did not care to go beneath the surface. J. Howard Littledale had heard a luncheon club speaker say that the nation would live to thank the Harding administration for its oil policy and had rushed to the office to tell Fordyce and me that that would be our position during the investigations.

“No,” Dan was going on, “I have no worries polit-



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ically. But I wish I could get straightened out in my mind about Laurel. In a year or two, when Bostwick dies and I'm senator, don't you imagine she could see that I've made good? We might come to an understanding."

I couldn't explain to him how far apart they were, had been since that night he had met her coming toward him under the trees on the lake shore at his country place.

"Dan, I don't know. As you say, to be United States senator,—you'd call that making good and so would people in general. But in the last twelve or thirteen years you have been thinking one way and Laurel another. You were all right when she first knew you, but your associations have done a lot to you. I can't answer. It's a riddle. You'll have to work it out yourself."

"Well," he finished lamely, "I'll see you when I get back from Florida. Going down there for a little rest."

He wandered off. I sat there wondering what special quality these men in politics had that enabled them to impress cold, hard-hitting business men as he had done a few minutes before.

Informed, able, decisive, the business and professional men seemed to be the best minds we had. Frequently one heard about them getting into office. Magazine articles sometimes pictured them taking charge of government, conducting it as methodically, as efficiently, as they ran their factories and stores. A favorite theme was their accredited ability to take the tariff

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out of politics and put it on a business basis. Government, said some of the experts, was simply business and engineering; look, they said, at the city manager plan of municipal administration. But it didn't happen in our state. The business men not only voted when asked as the politicians desired, but they permitted the political group to do their thinking for them as Dan had just done in the matter of the road bonds, the proceeds of which undoubtedly would be enjoyed, surely wasted, and perhaps embezzled.

I mentioned this to John Fordyce at our last meeting.

"I know what you mean, Jim. It's the enigma of our system. Maybe the answer is that democratic government, depending on the governed being informed and acting on their information, is unworkable. Sometimes I think people like to be governed; it's too much trouble for them to govern. Look at Bostwick,—the perfect type of business man's candidate; he'd have been licked if the organization hadn't decided to let him in and wait for him to die."

"We're printing a little news story about Mrs. Fitch this afternoon," he went on. "She's leaving Illyria; been offered a job with the Republican headquarters in some state out west.

"Albree must have helped her to it. Pretty smart,—doing something for her at last without putting her on the official pay-roll in Illyria.

"She'll do better among strangers. Mollie told me about it,"—Mollie was the woman reporter who had been in Mrs. Fitch's confidence,—“and she says it's

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really a laugh. You see, Albree can swallow anything in a man, but he's in terror of the new woman. Mrs. Fitch likes her liquor and she has to have a lot of cigarettes in the course of a day. She can talk the politician's language. But the little Senator belongs to the school that thinks a woman who smokes a cigarette is dangerous. She might corrupt some of his budding statesmen. Mollie says Carolyn is exactly what the party needs, but as she happens to be a woman the Senator can't take a chance. So he recommends her somewhere else."

"I'm not surprised. Meredith was afraid of her. He was so cautious he gave himself away."

"She spent her own money working without appointment in the Bostwick campaign. She showed what she could do."

"You forget she was tight with the rest the night Mrs. Meredith died."

"So were some of our prominent men. Why penalize the woman? If you're going to take her in, why not trust her all the way?"

I had no answer to that, and Fordyce went on:

"You see what these men run up against. It's their old ingrained ideas about women. They make them equals up to a certain point and then the old caution, the old reservation, creeps in. The only way it will ever work will be for the women to hold out,—not booze around, down on the level of these fellows, but make the men come to them. All they have to do is say **nothing**, do nothing and vote. I can see what Mrs.

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Fitch was trying to do, but it won't work. There's nothing in this good pal business."

Fordyce refused to say good-by to me.

"I'll turn up some day where you are; or you will be in my office. It's all the same. Let's just say you're going away on a trip and I'll be seeing you again."

I insisted on trying to thank him for helping me.

"That's all right," he replied. "I've used you to say things to that I wasn't allowed to write. That makes it all square."

Before Meredith came back from Florida I had left Hamilton and was living in New York. And though I had been so intimate with him, it was not he but John Fordyce whom I missed and regretted leaving. Fordyce and his sound, kindly, detached opinions . . . the good journalist.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE original draft of this chapter began with the following paragraph:

"On an afternoon in May, 1925, Dixon Latrobe and I were sitting on the lawn of Riverside, Laurel Fife's home on Long Island. Some garden chairs and a tea table had been carried out to an immense oak that stood within a few feet of the water. I was lazily watching the changing effects of the declining sun against the dull red brick and gray stone of the compact little house two hundred feet from us at the top of the slope. Dixon in a light-green dress—I recalled my Chicago fantasy of her in apple-green—was opposite."

How like a description of the third act setting for a drawing-room play that sounds! The program would cover it by stating, "Lawn in rear of Laurel Fife's country home; six months later."

I object to it because it is a scene inappropriate to a newspaper man such as I have represented myself at that period, and also because it has that "end-of-the-book" flavor. As I frankly agree with all the reader's impatience with such a chapter beginning, I am counting on good-natured tolerance. The reason for the description is found in reality. If it is a picture from a country-life magazine I can not help it; that is the way it was.

On Dixon's lap was the manuscript of *Madame*

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Peggy. She had had it for a week. Invited by Laurel for Saturday and Sunday, I had come out from town expecting Dixon would tell me what she thought of my two-and-a-half acts. I had found her on the lawn with the sheets in her hands.

She had not spoken of it at once, and I was so gathered in by the perfect restfulness and stillness of Riverside, reached after uncertain village taxi-ing from the railroad five miles away, that I didn't care if she should forget it for the time if I could sit near her on Laurel's lawn and look at her and her background.

Presently she put the papers back in their box and laid it on the table.

"Colin Hay will be here for over Sunday, and Charles Carter, if he can get away. Charles makes it a point to be too busy to come to parties so he can choose the few he fancies; but he usually shows up when Laurel asks him. He has read *Madame Peggy*."

"It was nice of you to ask him."

"Nice nothing! Pure selfishness. You've got to get ahead. Charles," she went on, "thinks something might be done with it. That is the highest praise from him. I'm going to pin him down this week-end. Colin is here often, still hoping Laurel will give him whatever affection she can. He will never stop loving her. If she marries somebody else he will still love her. Colin is perfect. I know it sounds unsophisticated to say so, but he is a good man."

Then, her eyes serious, she put out a hand and touched the card-board box on the table.

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"This is rather touching, I think. It may come to nothing, but it satisfies me because you went ahead with it and carried it on with such simplicity. That was you, Jim. You didn't talk back, but because you wanted to please me you went ahead with it the best you could."

Her eyes were full of tears. I started to say something but she stopped me, smiling with wet cheeks.

"Don't, Jim. Let me enjoy this in my own way. I am very happy."

When she had dried her face and fixed it up she added, "Women almost never get a chance with their men. The men won't let them have it. You might have said, 'No; I can't write a play, but I'll go out and make a half million selling tires, or insurance, or inventing a loud speaker.' And you'd never have known why I couldn't be enthusiastic about it. But you didn't. I'm an awfully lucky girl."

I felt very peculiar; terribly unreal. She had got hold of the wrong man, or the wrong play, or something.

"Dixon," I began again.

"Not now; I asked you not to. You have done something wonderful to me. But, of course, you're a man, after all, and as soon as you begin talking and explaining you'll spoil it."

So we just sat there, which was enough, considering the tranquillity.

I had not seen Laurel. Dixon had met me in town twice for lunch so I knew how the death of Alice Mere-

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dith had been received. Dixon had thought best to hand her my telegram. She had looked from it back to Dixon and said:

"Jim didn't need to put in that about the coroner. If there had been nothing strange about it he would not have wired me."

That had been on their way home from the theater in New York, a few days before *The Enchantress* had moved to Boston. Laurel had not asked for any more information and had not indicated by word or manner what her thoughts were about Meredith's changed status. She had been much with Colin Hay, and after the news spent more rather than less time with him. As Colin was in charge of the production that, Dixon explained, was nothing. But, she had added, she still reads the Hamilton newspaper that has been coming to her for three years.

While we sat there by the river, Laurel came out of the house with Carter and crossed the grass toward us. I thought she was superb. Her house and grounds were a setting no stage picture could give her beautifully poised figure and the alert happy lift of her lovely head.

She was in white, a childlike simplicity resulting. If I had not known she was thirty-three or so I should have guessed her back in her twenties. In her leisurely progress with Carter she gave the suggestion of taking time to enjoy each pressure of her feet on her own turf. As I got up to greet her I thought she must be loving this place that she had earned.



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"I think we are an awfully nice little family party, Jim," she said, smiling. "You remember Charles Carter."

"This is Dixon's young man, isn't it?" the playwright asked. "If I had had an agent like Dixon twenty years ago I would not have had to wait till I was gray before having enough to eat."

He looked genuinely kind as he placed a chair for Laurel and stood by the table filling his pipe.

"Colin should be here in a moment." our hostess went on. "We are all on vacation, Jim. I hope you have no anxieties. I want everybody to relax."

"Relax!" Carter puffed rapidly on the short black stem. "And me at fifty trying to get some natural-sounding cursing into my stuff so it will be up to date! These fellows who did *What Price Glory* fixed it so I can't relax. This boy here with his *Madame Peggy*,—she doesn't know how to swear!"

"Charlie, are you modernizing again?" Laurel looked at him accusingly. "You promised me you wouldn't."

She explained to me.

"He loses a year between plays by going to see what the others are doing and then writing one in what he thinks is the new manner. It is always a failure, which serves him right."

Carter gestured with his pipe. "Here's Hay. He thinks I can do something new. He wants me to take a crack at dramatizing this book, *The Constant Nymph*."

"Somebody will. But you don't have to work this

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year. I want you to take eighteen months off. I must scold Colin."

Hay included us in his smile before bending over Laurel's chair. She appealed to him:

"I want you to promise not to tantalize Charlie by making him think he could do *The Constant Nymph*. We have earned a vacation. If you get him started it will mean losing him, and he'll have us all working by the Fourth of July."

Hay reached across and shook hands with me.

"Glad to see you, Preston. Carter hasn't told the whole story, Laurel. I found him carrying around a copy of *Arrowsmith*. I was afraid he was going to try that so I gave him *The Constant Nymph*. I thought that if he must work this summer he'd better take something in his line."

"Charles Carter isn't going to do either one," Dixon put in. "He's going to take *Madame Peggy*, rewrite the second act and finish the third. And you, Colin, are going to cast it and put it on."

"*Madame Peggy*?"

"There's the script. It is a new play by James Preston, of whom you are to hear. He brought it at my request."

Hay took the box in his big brown hand, the hand of an athlete. Laurel's gaze was resting on him with contented affection.

"Why not, Colin? Jim has a good idea. If you and Charlie must work all the time. . . ."

They seemed so earnest. That was what I could not

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understand. They were not ridiculing the suggestion that material was available in my box of manuscript. I could not reconcile the situation with my estimate of myself.

Hay stood scanning the pages. I saw now what it was that made him different from the men I had been contemplating for the last few years. There was no selfishness, no calculation, in his face; there were no lines cut in by the fatigue of excess. His deep-set blue eyes, a contrast to his ruddy healthy skin, reflected frank interest as he read down the lines. I saw his lips twitch, and he looked at me.

"This isn't a bad idea, Preston."

Carter exclaimed, "Humph, not bad! Why, Colin, it's damned good!"

"Oh, you have read it?"

"Of course; and you and I are going to Winchell Smith it into shape."

A maid was coming across the grass. I supposed we were going to have tea, which would be the first time for me. I smiled to myself. All I knew about how to behave at tea in a garden I had got from reading Galsworthy. The maid spoke to Laurel, who had been laughing at Carter's ultimatum to Hay. Her laughter died and the smile went out as warmth fades from embers. I saw her fingers tighten on the arms of her wicker chair and she sat up very straight, looking around at her group, her eyes finally resting on me. Then she said to the maid:

"Please bring him out here."

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The others had paid no attention, but I had a pre-sentiment that was almost immediately confirmed. As soon as Laurel released my gaze I looked beyond her. The maid was disappearing at the distant house. She came back into sight promptly, with the caller; and then Dan Meredith came swinging across the lawn.

I got up. I remember patting a pocket and fumbling, for Dixon had said, "Jim, give me one of your cigarettes."

I saw Laurel standing with her chin lifted, her hands hanging at her sides, closed. She was looking away from us, out across the river. It seemed to me she had risen mechanically and was about to walk away. Just as Meredith reached the circle of chairs she turned ever so slowly and looked at him.

"Scott," she said in a high clear voice, "I am glad to see you. We are just about to have tea. I think you know James Preston. Jim, will you introduce Mr. Meredith?"

She stood there while I quickly went through the three routine presentations. She seemed to be waiting to see that everything was adjusted, for when I had finished she sat down abruptly.

Meredith, flushed and silent but wearing an uneasy smile, took the chair next mine. He had on a light tan suit striped with deep brown silk thread. His silk shirt carried out the brown and tan tones, which were repeated in the pattern of his necktie. On the ground beside him he had dropped an expensive-looking Panama hat. By contrast with the other men he looked

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dressed up; almost loud. He broke his silence almost immediately as if in answer to a need for greater ease.

"First time I've been East for thirteen years, except to run down to Washington on business," he said to nobody in particular. "I wouldn't make a very good actor. You show people have to travel a lot. I'd hate that." He looked around. "You're all in the show business except my friend Jim, I s'pose?"

"Mr. Carter wrote my last play and Mr. Hay directed it. Miss Latrobe was in the cast. Yes; we are all in the show business."

Two maids were now carrying tea things to the table.

"No; I guess I wouldn't care for it. I'm not much on the theater. I like a good musical show, though. I want to go to a couple while I'm here."

"The singing in *The Student Prince* is top hole," Colin remarked politely. "*Rose Marie, The Student Prince, The Love Song*—I haven't heard *Rose Marie*, but it is well spoken of everywhere."

"I've got to see Leon Errol while I'm in New York. He's always funny. And of course I'll go to *The Follies*."

Laurel, who had exchanged chairs with Carter so she could pour the tea, paused with a cup in her hand. Her face for a moment was pitiful. That minute she must have regretted her impulse to see Dan there. The maids had gone, and we were handing the cups and plates around.

"First tea I've tasted for a long time; probably since

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I was a kid," Meredith laughed. "We don't do this out where I come from."

Carter stirred comfortably and looked slowly from Meredith to Laurel. He began to speak evenly in a voice that took us all in.

"I want to tell you something funny I heard the other evening," he was saying. I saw he was watching Dixon, who nodded as if to say, "Go on; please go on; help her out." He launched into a series of three or four little stories, amusing incidents of his life and the lives of others around the theater. They were rich in fun and deftly told by a man gifted in anecdote. Without any apparent effort he took the conversational ball and kept it, giving everybody time to grow easy again.

But Dan was not used to listening. He had been trained in a school where everybody talked at once. Two or three times he leaned forward and uttered sounds that let me know he was going to break in. Finally, as Carter approached the end of a story but before he had reached it, Meredith began:

"That reminds me of one Dawes told me,—you know, Vice-President Dawes. It seems he and Hoover were talking one day while they were waiting to see Coolidge . . ."

Laurel raised her glance toward Colin across the rim of her cup. Dixon was staring at the ground. Carter was laying his cup on the table and reaching for his pipe. I wanted to speak out and tell these people about Dan. In a party of his kind, back in Hamilton, the

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effect would have been different, and the truth was that he was not introducing his tales of celebrities to connect himself with them. He was connected with them. Most of the men he began to mention he knew intimately, just as intimately as Carter knew his prominent people of the theater; the unfortunate thing about it was the way he was thrusting himself into command of the situation, rattling off a string of head-line names in his hotel manner. I was sympathetic with him, pitied him and wished he would be quiet. But he was going on:

" . . . and when Borah came back into the room you should have seen Jim Watson's face. I said to him afterward, 'Jim, you ought to be more careful.' Jim took it all right; he's a good fellow; most of those men are. Harding was a prince."

He was beginning to glow. I knew he would go on and on. Everybody else was silent, even at the pauses. Both Carter and Hay were paying scrupulous attention. They would not let Laurel down.

She had decided that tea was over. She took charge at the next breathing place.

"Dixon, would you like to show Jim around the grounds? Dinner is at half past seven. . . . Scott, of course you are staying?"

"Sure; I'd like to stay."

"Colin, we are in earnest about *Madame Peggy*. I'd like you to run through the manuscript with Charles before dinner."

We understood that she wanted us to go away till

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dinner-time and leave her there under the tree with her unexpected visitor.

As Dixon and I started along the river's edge together after her remark, "The gardens are this way," I asked:

"Hay knows about Meredith, doesn't he?"

"Yes," she responded. "That is, he knows enough. He knows Laurel has been bound to an idea that wouldn't let her promise him much. Colin isn't one to inquire."

When we cut across a corner of the lawn about a quarter past six Laurel and Dan were where we had left them. There was something stiff about the picture they made, Laurel sitting in her chair facing the river, Dan standing before her. It made us want to hurry out of sight.

"I am glad he came when he did since he had to come," Dixon commented. "She has never seen him in direct contrast to the men she admires."

"Comparison with the men she admires has nothing to do with love, has it?"

"What I meant was she has never seen him as he is. The others brought that out. Laurel has grown into something more than a bundle of emotions. She cares desperately for her work and for the people close to her in it, especially those who have had anything to do with her rise. Superlatively loyal. To go outside now would be unthinkable, and he could never enter her world. The only way he can touch her now is



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through the emotions. You sat there and watched them. You know they are strangers in every other way."

That must have been the reason for the stiffness of the scene at the foot of the slope. But I wasn't satisfied.

"Well, an artist,—that is what she is. The emotions must count a lot with her."

"That depends on what you mean by emotions. A man usually means one thing; a woman, especially a woman like Laurel, something else."

I had sense enough to know we were both too worried about our friends to discuss them safely. All we could do was put in the time till dinner, when we would see further. We were not to dress, so when Dixon left me I went to my room and lay on the bed thinking about the two figures there by the river.

At seven I got up and, making myself presentable, went down to the living-room, thinking I might have a word alone with Dan. But he was not there. Instead I found Charles Carter and Colin Hay. Carter, with a gesture, invited me to join them.

"Preston, Colin and I want you to leave this little piece of yours with us for a week or two. We want to talk about it again. Let me write down your address; we may want you to come and have lunch with us when our minds are made up. The thing will take a lot of work; not much of your actual writing will do. But Colin agrees with me. There may be a play in it. You wouldn't mind us working something out together?"

His politeness to anybody as lowly as I made me

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speechless. I could only mumble my pleasure at their unexpected serious treatment of what I had done. Dixon saved me by coming in and walking to the French doors from which she could overlook the lawn on the river side.

"They are still out there," she said. And she added, "Poor Laurel!"

Colin looked at the rug and said nothing. Carter, privileged, spoke up.

"Did you ever see so much force? Not so keen, but tremendous drive. Leading man for a certain kind of movie. Hope they come in soon. I am going to be hungry."

Dixon came over to me.

"She is still sitting the way she was. It hurts me. It makes me feel that she has not moved. He stands and looks down at her."

At twenty minutes to eight a maid came in, made some lights and spoke to Dixon in a low tone. Dixon said something in reply and then turned to me.

"Laurel has come in and has gone to her room. She wants you to go out and get her car and drive Mr. Meredith to the station. He is waiting out front. We'll give Carter and Colin a cocktail and put dinner off till eight-thirty."

"Mr. Meredith is not staying after all," she said to the others. "We'll have dinner as soon as Jim gets back from the station."

When I appeared at the entrance in the coupé I had taken from Laurel's garage, Dan got in without a word,

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and we started the climb upward between the borders of now dim dogwood blossoms toward the state road. We hadn't gone very far before he pulled out a pocket flask and tilted it for a copious drink. He drank without offering it to me.

"Everything's off. I couldn't make her see it," he said then.

"See what?"

"Why, getting married. When it comes right down to it, that's what we had in mind, wasn't it? That's what I came here for. I asked her."

"Not the first thing? Why didn't you wait till the second or third meeting?"

"I had it all figured out; just how to approach her. I thought that would be the best way, and then we could come to an understanding about details later; about Alice, for instance, if she was bothered about that. She'd have been a United States senator's wife next year, living in Washington. I tried to give her a hint about what might happen some day if things break right and we hold things together out home. She didn't get it at first and so I had to come right out with it. But when I mentioned the White House it didn't feaze her. She's too much for me. She kept saying over and over that those weren't the important things, that there was something else. And when I asked her what it was she couldn't tell me."

He took another pull from the flask.

"Say," he digressed abruptly, "they're a funny crowd, now aren't they, compared to our own people?"

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Never offered me a drink; never even mentioned it. Nothing but tea. They're dry, I suppose?"

"Not dry like the dries you know. They don't think about liquor all the time. That man Carter has a room stacked with cases of things from Europe, but he seldom uses anything." Dixon had told me that. "If you had stayed for dinner you might have got one good cocktail. They are interested in other things. It doesn't mean so much to them."

"I wouldn't stay to dinner. What was the use? Laurel just sat and looked at me as if she were sorry for me. Once she said I worried her because something had happened to me, but there it was again; she couldn't tell me what it was. I admitted I had treated her bad years ago, clearing out of Atlantic City that way. But I explained how it was. I apologized."

"Apologized! You didn't!"

"I certainly did. And I tried to make her see that I had made good in my line just as she had in hers. You know I've made good, especially for a fellow who didn't want to go into politics in the first place. You know I'm recognized."

"What made me mad," he went on, "was when she asked, supposing she did marry me, would she have to go and live among my friends and lead my kind of life. What did I think about that? That's where I brought in about the senatorship. Then she asked me if there was anything I wanted to tell her about Alice's death. Well, I told her there had been a little party, just like anybody might have, and some of us got a

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little too much, and Alice took some tablets for her head. That was the truth of it."

We were coming out on the railroad. I ran in and parked beside the little wooden station.

"She was so cold and sort of distant; always looking across the river and clenching her hands. Nothing like I thought she would be. You see, I used to imagine things about her, especially just after I had married Alice. I would think how Laurel would be different; how we would get along so much better than Alice and I. That used to make me sore at the Empire crowd. They didn't seem to have any life about them. But I guess I didn't understand Laurel. She thinks about funny things; abstract propositions. She's not practical."

We sat in the car waiting for the train.

"Have a drink, Jim," he invited after we had been silent for several minutes.

"No, thanks; I am off it for a while."

"How are you getting along? Got a good job?"

"Not bad."

"We miss you in Hamilton. We'd have made a big man of you if you had stayed with us."

"When is this senatorship going to break?"

"Any time. Bostwick's in bad shape. He's a very sick man."

"You are all set, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'm all set. That's what I told Laurel."

The train whistled down the line. Dan got out and stood on the brick platform. He was the only passenger.

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"I'll be at the Waldorf two or three days. Come and see me."

I nodded.

"Bring your friends in. We'll have lunch or something."

He climbed on the step and stood there as the train lurched out of sight.

Going back through the dusk I began to wish Carter, Hay and I as well as Meredith had taken the train for town. I did not see how that week-end could go on as it had been planned. Granting that Carter and Hay knew enough of Laurel's plight, the evening and day to come would be the more painful for her with three outsiders in the house.

I was to learn more of her, however. When I got there she was in the living-room with the others. She had changed to a dull blue dress with some gold stuff at the throat. There was something vibrant about her as she stood beside Colin in front of the white mantel.

When I appeared in the doorway she extended her hands to me, and when I went up and took them she smiled and said, "Jim, they tell me they are considering carpentering your play. Isn't that wonderful? I think we are going to have a cozy little week-end party here. I am so happy to have you all! Are we ready?"

And so we went in to dinner.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE death of United States Senator Theodore Bostwick was recorded in the New York newspapers one morning toward the end of June, his national significance being estimated at from fifteen to twenty lines on inside pages. One paper, however, took cognizance of the event on its editorial page, saying that Senator Bostwick's removal was the more regrettable because he had brought to his position valuable experience as an eminently successful governor of Illyria, and because he had embodied the qualities usually described when critics of government appeal for the election of abler and better men.

This editorial startled me by adding a note on the importance of having in the Senate and the higher posts of the executive department men who had made successes in their private enterprises, who would not be so likely to be tempted by opportunities offered by their official power. That the government was not plundered under the protection of the recent war, the paper suggested, was due in part to the occupation of key positions by men who were too accustomed to handling large sums of money and wide powers to be tempted to steal. The paragraph touched my newspaper instinct, making me feel that the writer had in mind some things

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he could not divulge, but of which his remarks were a premonitory hint.

Ten days afterward I received from John Fordyce an illuminating and characteristic letter.

"Bostwick's death is, of course, not news. Out of respect for him the papers here did not begin speculating about his successor until the day of the funeral. Although the political reporters knew, if the publishers did not, that Bostwick's successor had been selected long ago, the papers pretended that the field was open and that Governor Prentice was canvassing the available men for the ablest Republican for the office. I shall wire you when your friend Dan Meredith is appointed."

I could see what was going on. This business of seeming to cast about for the best man was part of the show. Two days later Fordyce wrote:

"There has been a hitch. Prentice has been having delusions of grandeur and is said to be considering resigning as governor with the understanding that Freeman, the Lieutenant-Governor, will appoint him to the Senate."

A third communication said:

"It is all in the air. The inside seems to be that as Meredith got only a paltry twenty thousand or so in his wife's estate, Albree is having doubts about letting him have the place. You see, Dan would have to run for the unexpired part of Bostwick's term at the next election and then for the full term. You know, of



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course, that means money. Old J. P. Overton had only given Alice an allowance and most of the estate was made up of the house in Empire. Besides, some of our inquisitive reformers got curious about that asphalt company Dan was in, so our friend withdrew from it somewhat hastily. For political purposes, the boy is broke. Some say Albree inspired Prentice to think of the vacancy for himself as a smoke screen. Pretending that he has to stop Prentice, Albree gains time. He went to Washington yesterday to be gone two weeks. There will be no appointment till he gets back and tells Prentice what to do."

That was all logical and in keeping with the rules of the game. Having made Prentice governor, Albree could expect him to wait for instructions about the pending appointment.

None of this, I knew, was being published in Illyria. Editorials discussing competent and disinterested but unnamed manufacturers, engineers and corporation executives as possible appointees would fill the interval until Senator Albree and the three or four in his confidence should decide what should be done.

Such editorials ignored the rule of the politicians that corporation executives were offensive to the farmers and to organized labor. It was nice to talk about government being largely business that could best be administered by a capable business man, but the innovation was not to be considered because it would not ally voters by groups to the party's future interest.

There was no dearth of men who had made successes in important private undertakings, men of experience,

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education, public spirit and liberal minds. Certain superior ones, informed, sophisticated and widely known, suggested themselves. Any of them would do credit to the state. Unfortunately, however, the place would have to be held within the limits of the coterie whose sole business was that of politics.

The Republican National Convention of 1920 had proved what could be done in holding the party's greatest prize within the special and separate world which had its foundations in states like Illyria.

Men whose lives were devoted to adding to the public wealth and contentment through the production and marketing of goods, the giving of employment, and the wise management of large institutions, were not desired. Merit and ability were necessarily secondary under the system. The man to be appointed would have to be one who would help himself to election and Albree to reelection in 1926. He would have to be able to command financial help for his own race in 1928. Such a man could be found among the leaders of business, but he would not answer the political description.

Meredith had answered perfectly, but his status had changed when his wife died. My observations made me believe that as the days went by without any action, his chances were fading. For Albree to be having second thoughts was ominous. It might easily mean that he had changed his mind about sending Dan to the Senate and was making Dan's lack of capital an excuse.

Dan was now in the precarious position that always awaits one who depends upon the good-will of another.

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Bostwick's death was to have made him. Until now he had advanced in standing without interruption. Now he was in danger of being discarded. The one who could approve or disapprove the appointment was thinking it over. Usually that was fatal. The result of after-thoughts is like the result of a conference,—negative more often than not.

The day I learned of Albree's delay in causing Governor Prentice to name Dan I was to go to Laurel's for dinner. She had telephoned me, saying she wanted to talk to me alone. With a vague impulse toward telling her what was happening I put Fordyce's letters in my pocket when I went to the train that evening.

Places had been laid for two on the terrace above the garden. I sat there with Laurel in the deepest contentment. I had not seen her since the visit of Meredith, but I had learned from Dixon that something definite had happened to her.

That Sunday after Meredith's departure Laurel had been alternately grave and gay, but in whatever mood she had been the perfect companion and hostess. I recalled how serene she had looked when, having taken us on a morning walk that had ended at a little church in a near-by village, she had sat beside Carter on the bench ahead of us, giving the responses and singing, her profile defined for us by a window of honey-colored glass. That day I had learned something of the influence she was with her intimates, saying little, but radiating her affection for the playwright, the Englishman who

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waited so patiently to serve her and the girl she had befriended and trained. It accounted for their loyalty. Dixon had given me a suggestion: "Laurel has purity of intention,—it will thrill you to find the lengths she will go for you, especially if she feels a responsibility."

We were having coffee when Laurel alluded to what she had asked me out to hear. The landscape, stretching for miles across the valley, was being dissolved in night, but we could still make out the tree under which she had sat with Meredith. She was meditating with her eyes on this when she began.

"I let him go away thinking it was all over. That was the necessary hard thing. From his point of view it is over. He could never understand the feeling I have. He had interpreted it as something that must find fulfilment in marriage. I could not do what he asked. But that does not end my concern. Nothing can erase the truth: if the reckless chivalrous idea he expressed thirteen years ago had not caused me to recoil from the desperate thing I was about to do, and if he had not responded to my need in a perfectly foolhardy and thoroughly fine gesture, I should not have reached my life's desire. From that point, Jim, I was assisted or guided forward and upward. Scott, poor fellow, was guided the other way. He may have been incapable of reaching the height of that moment again. I now see he never progressed beyond it, and when I talked to him here I could see what his associations had done for him. He lost his sense of values a long time ago. And I am so sorry. I could never be to him what I have

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fancied in the past that I might. But I shall never get over pitying him and wanting to help him. And I shall never stop being grateful. I caught his best intuition, but I was not able to hold it."

I listened to this low-voiced, slow-spoken confession with astonishment. She had revealed to me woman nature in an aspect that had been hidden from me. That was one thing. She had also expressed for me something of my own feeling for Dan Meredith. He was passing out of my world; or, rather, I had abandoned his. I could not admire him, but I would never cease being sorry for the waste of his life. And I knew that if he should ever come and ask my help I would not withhold it.

"He will be a senator now," she added. "I saw that the other man had died."

"I was going to speak about that. Things are not going well. I hear he may not get it."

"Why not? He was sure of it."

"Nothing is sure in politics. It's an appointment to the seat until the next general election in the state. And that is all right; but he would have to run for the remainder of the term and then for the full term; and that costs money. A senatorship has become an expensive luxury. You've seen some of the figures quoted from other states. While his wife lived he had the Overton money to help him. But it develops she had only a little of her own, and so, for political purposes, he isn't as valuable as he was. His stock has dropped. I think they are getting ready to eliminate him."

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"But that's so unfair after they've led him to expect it. Poor Scott! It means he has failed."

"The game has only one rule. 'Take care of yourself.' He'd be running in the same campaign next year as Senator Albree. Albree will need all the financial help he can get. He doesn't want to divide it with anybody. He knows Dan can't pay his own way."

"How much does such a thing cost?"

"I don't know. It varies in the states from a mere twenty-five or fifty thousand to a million. Getting into the Senate has become a business. The candidate or his friends have to pay for advertising, hotel suites, telephone and telegraph service, traveling, postage, all the machinery of publicity, and for personal workers. Without buying any votes a candidate might spend a hundred thousand. The amount a candidate may spend is limited by law, but the limit is too low. You can spend a lot without being crooked."

She had a better mind for grasping a political situation than the average woman.

"You mean that if Scott could show he could pay his bills and not interfere with Senator Albree in his own campaign they might let him have this appointment?"

"Exactly. I think Albree really wants him. He's popular; makes good speeches, and he is satisfactory to all the elements that have to be satisfied. Albree's a big man in the Senate now; there will be more of a war on him. It would be good policy to have a young fellow like Meredith running with him to divert the people's attention from the main issues."

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She was breathing rapidly as she leaned toward me across the candle-lit table.

"Do you suppose he would take it from me?"

I had to have time to think when she said that. I remember sitting there smiling at my cup. The irony of Meredith's position came at me with full force; and—I suppose it is a defect in my nature—I wanted to enjoy thinking about it. But the meaning of Laurel's impulse appealed to me immediately and I stopped smiling.

"I suppose a fiction writer would say that is magnificent. And it is. But, Laurel, I would feel too guilty, encouraging you to throw away your earnings in that fashion."

I saw at once it had been a brutal remark, though it had sprung from my sincere concern for her. Her face had grown stern.

"Don't speak like that, Jim. About throwing it away, I mean. I am secure, for a few years anyhow. But even if I weren't. . . . I don't measure things that way. I have tried to learn to think of things differently. Don't forget that our friend gave me money for food when I hadn't eaten for a long time. I had a suitcase in a railroad check-room and that was all. What I want to know is, can I help him get this thing he wants?"

I saw I had to speak to the question.

"If I know Meredith, he would take it; he would take it from you or from anybody else. No use to try to make him anything except what he is. But would you want to give it to him? He has one illusion,—that

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he is not only fitted for something high, but that he has been chosen, intended, you might say. I have talked to him about it. If you practically purchase the appointment for him you run the risk of robbing it of the one element that will make him feel his career is a success."

"I see . . . that's a good thought. We couldn't give it to him. We couldn't let him know. Is there any other way?"

I thought a while.

"It is barely possible that all Albree wants is assurance that at the proper time the organization would have access to a fund for Dan,—that he wouldn't be excess baggage in the Senator's own year. I know a man who could tell us about that. He's a sort of political agent, a manager. He makes a business of it."

Her eyes were bright and her lips were tightening in a resolve that was taking form.

"Could you get word to him? Would he come to New York if we paid his expenses?"

"I can find out by wire. But, Laurel . . . are you sure you want to go into this?"

She sat back, relaxed.

"I am sure I want to see Scott Meredith through."

"I can telephone the wire from here. It is a man named Marberry out in Hamilton."

We walked into the living-room. She stopped me as I went toward the hall to telephone.

"Jim," she said, "there's something else. I am going to marry Colin Hay."



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I waited, and in a moment she went on.

"It has been clear since Scott's visit. I can marry Colin; what I feel for him may be the substance of a fine marriage, and I must do it, for I am afraid of the shrill and harsh woman I am likely to be as a perverse old spinster. Remember, I am an actress or I am nothing. The other, my feeling for Scott, doesn't require marriage. It probably never did. The feeling persists; it resists all efforts to kill it, and yet, we could not marry. We would ruin each other. His nature—he certainly, in a way, killed his wife, didn't he? No; he will always affect me, but I am calm and sure now about my future. I need a man of my own kind—a man who speaks my language. That is Colin."

I nodded. She went on.

"It isn't going to be soon. No need for that. As long as it is understood it is as good as done. I have time and room for this last thing for Scott. He's got to have this in the way that will satisfy him. He must never know he has been a . . . failure."

I had worded my message to Marberry so as to arouse his professional curiosity if he should be open for an engagement, for I felt we were going to need more than his advice. The message brought the result. On the fourth day after telegraphing to him I met him in an up-town hotel. To save time if she should have to appear, Laurel came and waited within call.

Partly because Marberry knew I respected his success in his peculiar calling, he and I had always got

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along well. He had told me things that made me think he was the one person who could help us.

Without knowing it, Marberry had drifted into and developed a phase of the new profession of counsel in public relations. His capital and assets consisted of knowledge of the people and the conditions, prejudices, connections and relationships in Illyria. He had the ability to bring political figures into necessary favorable contacts. He was a sort of middle man or agent, making a living by his knowledge.

Under the circumstances it was possible for me to go directly to the subject. I asked:

"What has happened to Meredith? Why hasn't Prentice appointed him? I have a friend here who is heavily interested."

"It's perfectly simple. Bostwick died in time to throw both senatorships into an election next year. Whoever is appointed will have to run in 1926 with Albree. Jim Reed, this fellow Walsh, of Montana, and the rest of the investigators of Senate slush funds have scared the brothers who usually sign the checks for campaigns. That kind of money will be tight in 1926, except possibly in Illinois and Pennsylvania. There will hardly be enough to put one senator over in Illyria. Albree wants Dan on the ticket with him because Dan sits so well with the bone-drys and can bring in that vote for both of them. But Albree isn't the kind to divide the expense funds. The fellow who's appointed to this job will have to be able to buy his own ticket next year."

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"That is about the way I had it figured. He would O. K. Dan if Dan had some money in sight."

"Dan would go over in a minute if his wife were living. His wife's people would have financed him."

"How much would he need?"

"Not so much, but more than he has. It's going to take big money for Albree. He has been slipping with a lot of people. Albree may need a couple of hundred thousand."

"Dan will come lower, of course?"

"Oh, yes; seventy-five, eighty thousand would take care of him. He hasn't many enemies. He'd go in at the minimum for senators."

"I've got a friend who'd like to see Dan appointed. Could you talk to Albree?"

"There is only one thing he would listen to."

"I mean, if you could tell him Dan will be all right, that he will be able to finance his own campaign in 1926."

"Don't make me laugh. If your friend wants to put up some money we'd have to see it."

"My friend doesn't want to let Dan know. We want to fix it so that Albree will just tell Prentice to let the appointment go through as arranged. It is a peculiar case."

"That makes it hard."

"Yes; I know it makes it hard. That's why I asked you."

"Preston, you know I don't talk. Suppose you give me the facts. Who is your man? What is he after?"

## *Dear Senator*

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If Marberry had been a politician instead of one who was a specialist to politicians I should have hesitated.

"It isn't a man; it's a woman."

He did not grin, look sly, or say "Oh!" That is one thing about Marberry.

"So you see we can't come out with it. It is a woman who wants to help him out for reasons of her own and doesn't want him to know it."

He sat studying the situation. Presently he said:

"I could do this. I could show Tom Albree a certificate of deposit in my name and tell him I was going to run Dan's campaign next year. He would understand that. Albree doesn't trust many people, but he trusts me. I should want ten per cent. for myself."

I didn't like a certificate of deposit in a Hamilton bank. Marberry, I explained, would have to remember that Laurel must be protected all along the line. "Why not," I countered, "let him know you have access to a safety deposit box here in New York and you have seen some money or some bonds counted into it to be used for Dan?"

But he was certain Albree would not be convinced.

"Suppose your friend put, say, seventy-five thousand or so in bonds in a brief case. I'd get on a train and go down to Washington and let Albree count the bag."

Something concrete was necessary. He added:

"I could say, 'A friend of Meredith who doesn't want to appear says I can spend this in getting him the nomination in the primary next year.' He might let go.

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If the thing broke right I could transact all the business and your friend needn't be known to anybody. But you can't do it unless I can show Albree the stuff."

I saw I was as far as I could go, and I was not pleased. Asking Marberry to wait I went to Laurel in the writing-room.

After she had listened to my explanation of what Marberry said must be done to save Meredith she sat and regarded me calmly.

"Jim," she asked, "why are you so agitated? Is it because you do not want me to go into this?"

"I can't help being uneasy. You see, I know the life so well. It's dirty, and it's dangerous."

She smiled, a little wearily.

"I am not afraid. Why try to arrange some difficult and complicated scheme with the idea of protecting me? You act as if we were doing wrong. I am trying to do something right. The simpler the method the better."

I was silent under the rebuke.

"Do you suppose I am afraid? If it will simplify Mr. Marberry's part I am willing to go to Washington with him and call on Senator Albree. I am willing to tell him frankly I shall pay Scott's way next year provided Scott is not told the source of the help."

"But he would not understand your motive."

"My boy, what Senator Albree thinks of my motives is nothing to me. That doesn't enter at all. You imagine these men could hurt me. That's natural in you, but it is unnecessary. I would be in danger only if the thing were underhand."

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"Well, what do you suggest?"

She rose. "Take me to Mr. Marberry," she said decisively. "We need not consider bonds to show the Senator. We can give him the cash in a bag. Let him take that and look at it."

She laughed gaily, as if she at last saw her way clear.

"He might be afraid to look in a little black bag; we shall find a nice brown one. Afterward, Mr. Marberry can deposit the money in his own name in Hamilton to be used if it is needed. If he thinks I can clinch it by going to Washington and appealing to Senator Albree I shall go."

Laurel walked beside me with a step that meant vitality and power.

"I detest making a mystery of things as if we were planning a crime. You men are always looking for the hardest way. But, of course, Jim, I know your reason. You are my protector. I love you in that attitude, even when you are a bit difficult."

That evening Jack Marberry took the train for Washington. Among his belongings on that trip was a neat little Boston bag, brown, and plump with the cash guarantee of Dan Meredith's 1926 campaign bills.

## CHAPTER XIX

MARBERRY'S telegram, "Things look good," came the evening of the day after our conference. The following morning I opened my newspaper to find Dan Meredith's eyes gazing into mine from a half-tone under the caption: "Youngest Senator."

I went at once to the telephone. Laurel answered, "I have already seen it." From the fading note in her voice I knew I should not try to discuss the outcome with her then. The Press Association dispatch from Hamilton ran something like this:

"Governor Samuel Prentice of Illyria late to-night announced the appointment of Daniel Scott Meredith, of Empire, this state, as United States Senator to succeed the late Theodore Bostwick. Mr. Meredith, a Republican, will serve until the next general election when, it is expected, he will be a candidate for the remainder of Senator Bostwick's term. Senator Meredith is thirty-seven years old, the youngest Senator to represent Illyria in Washington. He has been serving his second term as Secretary of Public Affairs and is regarded as one of the strongest men among the younger Republicans of the state. He first became prominent in state politics in 1920 when he was one of the original Harding men. Senator Meredith will go to Washington soon to confer with his colleague, Senator Thomas Albree, who will present him for the oath at the opening of the session in December. The appointment is consid-

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ered most satisfactory to the bone-dry element of the party, as Meredith has always been among those standing for a rigid enforcement of the state and federal prohibition acts."

I must quote here a paragraph from the *Hamilton* (Illyria), *Express*,—Meredith's statement for publication when interviewed on his appointment. It shows how thoroughly he had learned his trade. Fordyce sent the clipping to me without comment, and it needed none. Meredith had said:

"My appointment to this high office comes as a distinct surprise to me, for while I have always taken a deep interest in the welfare of Illyria I have never sought preferment, always believing the office should seek the man. But, as I often say, a public office is a public trust that a good citizen can not put aside. So I am forced to accept the honor, hoping I may be of some small service to our great commonwealth in that august body known as the United States Senate. If my services there bear out the confidence placed in me by our honorable and distinguished Governor, I shall await with equanimity the verdict of the people at the polls when the time comes to fill the office by election. I want to pay tribute at this time to the memory of that great and good man I have the honor to succeed,—the late Senator Theodore Bostwick, a man I respected and admired. I must also acknowledge my pleasure in being a colleague of that great leader of Illyrian affairs, Senator Thomas Albree. I have only one regret on this solemn occasion, and that is that my dear wife was not spared to share with me the joys of this hour."



It may be serviceable to point out that American political figures have two languages, the one they speak and the one they write when they are called on to make a statement to the people. Meredith would never use the word 'preferment' or 'equanimity' in conversation, nor would he utter the platitude about public trust. But on the platform, or when talking for publication, he would use all these and many others that the political mind imagines the people expect. Senators and Representatives grow accustomed to using this special language studded with outworn, hackneyed, meaningless oddments and remainders of a century of oratory. They employ it first purposely and at last mechanically. That is one of the reasons for the strange language of the *Congressional Record*, which appears nowhere else in the world.

Note that Meredith referred to Governor Spencer, Senator Albree and the Senator who had just died. This gesture was also in obedience to a routine. All public statements by men in such a situation are expected to allude to every interest that may be expecting an allusion. For example, it would never do to slight the friends of Senator Bostwick but it was also necessary to use slightly stronger terms in speaking of Albree. It is probable that Meredith's statement was submitted to three or four associates in Hamilton before it was given to the papers. In the same circumstances, if the appointee should write an informal and sincere statement omitting the shopworn phrases his advisers would reject it.

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After breakfast I sent Dan a wire of congratulation, stopping on my way to the hall where Colin Hay, in shirt and golf trousers, was spending these summer days putting a half-dozen actors through the new version of *Madame Peggy*. At the same time he was unconsciously giving proof after proof of my ignorance. I was being shown that by my obedience to the newspaper rule of telling the most important fact first I had given away almost at the outset the point on which my story turned. This and all my other literary faults I was seeing paraded on a bare platform. All that was left was a trace of the central character and the basic idea of the plot.

I could not see that Charles Carter had actually written much. One day when we were discussing the play he had said, "Do you suppose we could get Miami Reeve?"—meaning an actress for the name part; and the next week he had called me and said they had Miss Reeve, her manager had taken a share in the show, and rehearsals would start the next day. From then on he and Hay forgot me and everybody else while they built the piece up scene by scene in the hall they had taken for rehearsals.

A typewritten book had arrived from a stenographic bureau the morning of the first meeting with the cast, and at first the men and women on the platform carried their copies around and referred to them and made marks in them when lines and business were altered; but as Hay revised, transposed, rewrote, eliminated and added, these books became practically useless and dis-

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appeared into pockets. I knew that both he and Carter, as they got deeper and deeper into their project must be working on the lines at night, for each day brought fresh plans for handling moments that were giving trouble. These changes would often nullify everything that had been done the preceding day until it seemed to me we were having more rather than less chaos.

Without regard for the mass of material they were accumulating the playwright and director kept working in their own inscrutable manner toward a goal that I could not see. Then, without any indication visible to me, the disorder and confusion straightened themselves out. One day I went to the hall to discover the players going through scene after scene without many of the interruptions and discussions of the days that had just passed. The process and the result both baffled me.

My original thought for the great moment in the life of *Madame Peggy* I had placed in the second act, committing my newspaper fault of giving my important news as soon as possible. This had now been moved along to almost the end of the play and the spot in the second act had been filled with material that had come not from me but from Carter, with amendments and suggestions from Hay. At the moment of perfection and completion, the star put forward a hint of how she thought two scenes could be pointed up and her suggestions were recognized, debated and adopted. I was blown along by the winds of these strong personalities and apparently ignored.

Then one Sunday I found four lines in the *Times*

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saying that a new play called *Madame Peggy*, by James Preston and Charles Carter, was to be presented out of town the next week, with Miami Reeve in the title rôle. It sounded unreal because it was unreal to me; it had been that from the beginning. I had had no faith in that faint conception of a fiction character written as a short story to make me somebody in the eyes of Dixon Latrobe. I now saw I had had too little confidence in the goodness and sincerity of these friends of hers who, at her urging, had examined my work seriously in search of any possibilities for development. I did not deserve such treatment for I had been skeptical at every step. The vitality and force demanded had all been supplied by the others.

As I watched the result being played in the final stages, preparatory to an opening in Atlantic City, I felt like running away from it in shame, for it had been brought into being by these men in spite of me; yet I could see that what they had preserved through all the torment of play building was this fundamental idea of mine. Without that there would have been no play. I wondered if that was considered a contribution sufficient.

At that point I began to catch a glimmer of meaning. Carter and Hay had been working objectively with an idea that had appealed to their professional curiosity. It was that which had held them, and so it was that which had carried the thing through. They had not been thinking about themselves or me, but about the idea; and in doing so they had made it theirs, and

the actors' as well as mine. I had done nothing to help on the production. I had not been expected to because I could not; my part was the character of *Madame Peggy*, and when they came to the end and we were ready to open both Carter and Hay suddenly remembered and said so. Eating together one evening when nothing more could be done, they began to talk about my play and began to give me all the credit. So did Miami Reeve, eating bacon and eggs on a bare tile-topped table. She said I had given her the best part she had had in years. It was a mad world, this one where men and women did miracles and then gave praise to another. Perhaps it struck me with greater force because their attitude was so different from that of the political world in which I had spent the last five or six years.

Laurel and Dixon went down to Atlantic City for the trial. Ever since the telegram from Marberry and the news from Hamilton, Laurel had devoted herself to the play. If it should look strong enough for New York and get a start there she and Colin were to be married and sail for England. She refused to consider a part for herself before spring. I had the impression that these days were precious to her; were connected in some way with her sense of proportion in living. When I saw her she looked contented. What she had done for Meredith must have, I thought, completed something for her.

The evening before *Madame Peggy* opened, Dixon and I went for a tramp along the beach. There was a

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fine high sky with brilliant stars. The tumbling sea silenced us as soon as we climbed down from the Boardwalk, and we walked north for a mile on the hard sand before anything was said. I was thinking how much consent and understanding had entered our odd relationship since we had begun work on the play. Nearly all our conversations had been about lines, scenes, business, emphasis. Dixon and I either were engaged or we weren't; things had stood like that since the time we had come so close together at Laurel's. I knew I was toward her as Hay had been toward Laurel. No matter what happened, I was absorbedly devoted to her.

When we went back to the Boardwalk to go down to our hotel we stood for a little, leaning on the railing, looking out to sea. Finally Dixon said:

"Jim, you understand that this piece probably will fail. The chances are always that way. Nobody can predict in this business. There is only one test: will people buy seats?"

"Seeing it come this far is more than I deserve. I wish it could go over on Carter's and Hay's account. I don't care for myself."

I had echoed Laurel on *The Enchantress*.

"Jim, that's a beautiful speech, and I know you mean it. But you've got to stop thinking like that. I love you for it,—and I want you to quit it."

"Why?"

"Because you do deserve a run. No use denying the truth. It is your play. You thought of it. Don't let things fool you. Carter and Hay have done a good job

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of dressing your idea, but it was yours in the first place. They wouldn't have touched it if they hadn't seen the stuff in it. Don't imagine those men would waste their time just because you happen to be a nice boy. And you've got to want to see it pull on your own account. I am going to make you harder and more selfish; more like I am."

"You are hard, aren't you?"

She ignored that.

"Harder for me. From now on you can't afford to be too nice and too generous. One of these days I am going to bring it around so you'll have to ask me to marry you. . . ."

I had not done that, specifically. I had never thought I had advanced far enough. But I must have done it then for I recall she said, "I hate to think of marrying you, Jim, for then you won't be as you are now, and you'll start talking about demanding a good contract for your next play and saying if you don't get it you'll be damned if you'll let them have it. I am so happy, and so sorry it's all over."

We walked back to the hotel, and after I left her I went prowling out again. Going to bed was an absurdity I was in no mood to contemplate. Between trying to conceive myself as a playwright and trying to realize Dixon Latrobe I was almost incoherent. But I had had enough of the beach. I had no desire to go out and watch the dark swells and the breakers rolling in. I wanted to go where people were and try to get down to an every-day sort of feeling so I could sleep.

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Turning in at the first promising entrance, I found myself being led to a table in a packed supper show.

A wide low room filled with little tables around which men and women were drinking and smoking in a businesslike manner was what I had exchanged for the outdoors, and my desire to be in a crowd was immediately surfeited. I knew now I did not want to sit and watch dancers and listen to blues. I had imagined, as one will, that a place like this would be gay, with people having a good time, and I would have fifteen minutes of fun that would take my mind off the excitement of the day. But the mechanical effect of this organized pleasure depressed me, so I looked around thinking of a possible exit to the side-street that would save me from crossing the immense, smoke-filled, noisy room again.

It was then that I saw Dan Meredith watching me from a table a dozen steps away. Startled, I nodded and went over to him. Filled with the sense of impending complications, I greeted him with affected humor to cover my confusion.

"My dear Senator, . . ."

He was unaffectedly, almost pathetically, glad to see me. Heavier, with the flesh that forbodes a flabby middle age and tells of easy living, he moved with an effort as I came up, half rising and extending a moist cushioned hand across his table. I noted a partly consumed sandwich, a bottle of ginger ale, a bowl of melting ice cubes, and a loaded ash-tray. These told me he had been sitting there a long time. He pointed to the chair opposite.



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"Sit down, Jim. I'll get some more ginger ale. Here, waiter!"

I sat down. His eyes were roving for the distant waiter. I saw he was dressed in an oxford gray cut-away, a startling wine-red scarf giving him a theatrical touch. The cutaway must have been his first costume.

"I want to thank you for that telegram," he said. "It was the first I got. But I got a lot finally, and a hundred and two letters."

The waiter came, and Dan instructed him as if we were to be in the place for hours. Then he went on.

"Some of the fellows thought I wasn't going to get it. But I knew I would. I knew Albree wanted me. I got a nice letter from him after Prentice came through. And when I saw him in Washington he told me how it was about the delay. He was fixing it up about the money. He had to see some people for me, he said, and that took time. But he said it was all arranged. He was mighty glad to arrange it for me; he told me so."

"Albree told you he was looking after your interests all the time?"

"Sure. You see, I'll give the ticket some strength next year. So I just kept quiet. I knew he'd have to come to me. It's to his interest to take care of me. What he did, probably, was to see some of the regular big givers and get a little guarantee. It doesn't matter; I'll find out about it in time. Whoever it was will be around to collect."

While I sat and studied him, thinking of the person who had furnished the money that had made his appointment certain, a blues singer from the floor show

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sidled by. Dan grinned blandly up into her hard eyes and tried to catch her hand. "Come and sit down, girlie," he said hoarsely. But she side-stepped abruptly.

"Don't touch me, you big tramp!" she threw back.

Senator Meredith laughed uneasily and looked at me. Then he busied himself under the edge of the table, pouring the basis of two highballs.

"Damned little trollop! Fill up your glass, Jim. What are you doing here?"

I told him briefly.

"What kind of a play is it? Not musical? I like a good musical comedy. Hope you make a lot of money."

His eyes were on a near-by table where the singer had sat down. He had not grasped the significance to me of this opening in Atlantic City. I did not expect him to. He had turned into one of those who can not think effectively and consecutively of anybody else's affairs. I might have talked an hour about *Madame Peggy* and he would not have heard me. He would have been just as vague after a recital of details.

He took a swallow and frowned at my untouched glass.

"You know, Jim, this is a great day for me. Ever since my appointment I've been thinking about coming here. I'll let you in on a secret. I came here to celebrate. You know why? It was in one of these cafés that Seneca Giles got hold of me when I was just a youngster and told me that if I played the game back home in Empire they'd make something of me. I was sitting just like this."

He leaned toward me, his arms on the table. Paper

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hats were being given out and the music had become a din.

"Two or three times after that I got sore at them, Giles and the rest, I mean; especially when I was having trouble at home. But it all straightened out. It always does, you know. They were right. Seneca said I could be anything I wanted to be. And he was right about that. Here I am sitting just as I was then; and I'm a United States senator. They did their part. Of course, I made good. My friends know I've got the stuff or they wouldn't help me along. Jim, give me ten, fifteen years,—you may be calling a president of the United States by his first name one of these days."

He turned to his glass, found it low, and held it below the table to fortify what remained.

"Yes, sir! You may do that thing. Then you can look back and remember where we were when I told you. You can look back just as I am doing to-night. Wish you'd have a drink."

"I'm not drinking just now, Dan. But don't let that interfere."

He lighted another cigarette and looked at me with a deprecating smile, the kind you don't like to get from a man.

"Jim, somehow I am afraid you're not satisfied with me. You're not like the other men I know; never have been. You're always looking at me and thinking. I wish you'd do something—have just one little drink with me. Help me out with this celebration. It's hard to celebrate by yourself. We've been pretty close, you and I."

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It was pitiful.

"Think of it, Jim. I came all the way here to sit in the same place and think how I started. That's a hot one. A United States senator doing that! You ought to get something out of that for a play. On account of the way we used to be, have just one. It's good liquor; the federal enforcement agent out home gave it to me as an appointment present."

I saw he was beginning to be affected by the samples of the gift.

"Well, Dan," I agreed, "I'll take one on your appointment. Then I've got to go to bed."

As I raised my glass he was off on a new subject. The waiter had laid two red paper fezzes on the table and Dan gravely put one on.

"See anything of Laurel now? Wonderful girl; but it wouldn't have done for me to marry her. It was better for me when she couldn't see it."

I didn't say that Laurel was in Atlantic City at that moment.

"And yet, Jim, she was here with me that night. You know how it was. It's hard to explain; I'm not clear in my own mind about her. It wouldn't have done . . . but every once in a while I catch myself wishing she was here with me. I guess that's why I wanted you to sit in with me. Let me give you another. No?"

What he had taken was affecting his hands. He reached for the ash-tray and upset it. The little paper fez and his serious anxious face made a study in incongruity.

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"Well, Jim, I'm sorry you won't. We could have a good party here. I've got plenty of stuff up in my room at the hotel. Seems a shame we can't get together."

I could not think of anything to say. I was ashamed of the manner I was turning to him, but I was powerless. I got up. He realized that I was going; that there would be no party, for he stood also, a little unsteadily. His glass fell on its side and the liquid spread into a lake of stain on the cloth, but he did not notice it.

I reached across and shook his hand, saying something about a heavy day ahead. He was looking at me searchingly as if trying for an answer to something. Then he shook his head, throwing off the thought. The red paper fez canted ludicrously. When he spoke there was insistence on a fact in his tone and a hint of defiance as if he were making an effort to establish something definite.

"Anyhow . . . I'm a senator,—a United States senator. You can't deny that. And in the end I got it myself. Money or no money, Albree had to give it to me. He knows my strength. They can't take that away from me. . . . I'm a senator."

He crumpled his napkin and let it fall on his chair as he turned and followed me with his eyes.

He was standing there in the midst of the crowd, the red fez tilted over one eye. He was still looking after me with a puzzled, almost bewildered expression on his face as I went through the door to the Boardwalk.



















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